

More than Singers
**Biography, Gender and Agency in the Voices of Four Women
Singer-songwriters in Contemporary Portugal**

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Abstract

Keywords: Ethnography of Performance, Singer-songwriter, Biography, Voice, Gender

This dissertation addresses the relationship between gender, music, poetic creation and performance in contemporary Portugal. It focuses on the lives and work of four women singer-songwriters who represent different generations, artistic profiles and music stylistic options. Though the singer-songwriters portrayed in this dissertation are commonly referred to - in the media, by musical agents and listeners - only as singers, they see themselves primarily as authors and composers. I analyze how their agency is expressed through their authorial and metaphorical voices, shaping listeners' subjectivities and mediating personal beliefs and social/political concerns. Through the articulation and analyses of their music, poetry, biography, performance and the discourses that revolve around them, I attempt to show how gender affects all aspects of music making. Since patriarchal gender ideologies are deeply ingrained in the music industry as in society in general, these four case studies demonstrate how gender asymmetries can stimulate and shape music making, performance and its reception.

Mais do que Cantora

Biografia, Género e Ativismo nas Vozes de Quatro Cantautoras em Portugal

Teresa Maria Marques de Matos Ferreira (Teresa Gentil)

Resumo

Palavras chave: Etnografia da Performance, Cantautor(a), Biografia, Voz, Género

Esta dissertação aborda a relação entre género, música, criação poética e performance musical no contexto português contemporâneo. Incide sobre o trabalho criativo e histórias de vida de quatro cantautoras, representativas de diferentes gerações, perfis artísticos e estilos musicais. Embora frequentemente referidas - nos media, por agentes musicais e ouvintes - como “cantoras”, elas identificam-se primeiramente como autoras e compositoras. Analiso aqui como o seu agenciamento se expressa através da sua voz autoral e metafórica, mediando crenças pessoais, preocupações sociais e políticas e moldando subjetividades dos e das ouvintes. Através da análise articulada entre a sua música, poesia, biografia, performance e discursos que as envolvem, procuro demonstrar como o género afeta todas as fases da criação musical. Face a um quadro patriarcal de género profundamente enraizado e naturalizado na indústria musical, tal como na sociedade em geral, estes quatro estudos de caso revelam como assimetrias de género podem estimular e moldar a criação musical, a performance e a sua receção.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Gender and music performance

In the last decades, an extended body of literature in Ethnomusicology has been devoted to music and gender, emphasizing women's musical practices (Koskoff 1987, 2014; Danielson 1997; McClary [1991] 2002; Magrini 2003; Moisala and Diamond 2010; Hayes 2010; Rasmussem 2010; Hellier 2013). Often conducted by women ethnomusicologists and historical musicologists, these publications "affected the way we look at all performance" (Rasmussen 2010: 222). Through the analysis and discussion of women's musical creation, these scholars allowed "a new awareness of a gendered aesthetics of performance that can be accessed and expressed by any performer" (*idem*).

This dissertation is grounded in recent perspectives on music and gender, with special focus on how gender affects music composition, performance and reception. My main emphasis is on music performance as a socially constructed communicative process, where meanings emerge from the subjective interpretation of signs (verbal or not) produced by a body in a given context. I depart from the premise that performance "has effects on the world" (Wong 2008: 78) and is grounded in political thinking revealing that, to some extent, the work developed by singer-songwriters often influences and transforms our own subjectivities. In sum, performance ethnography "presupposes that performance is culture-making" (*idem*). In this sense, "culture" is a fluid and continuous process of (re)definition, where "differences between and among individual actors and agents in a society or community are seen as crucial to the reproduction and transformation of its musical culture" (Ruskin, Rice 2012: 307).

The performer's subjectivity is, in turn, affected by the reception and response of listeners¹ and other agents involved in the processes of decoding and interpreting the music. As stated by Steven Feld², for communication to occur, both performer and audience must share some level of social competence that allows communication and its

¹ "Ethnomusicologists have long argued that, in principle, listeners should be considered musicians, and that they deserve to be studied as seriously as performers and composers are" (Ruskin, Rice 2012: 306).

² I adopt Steven Feld's definition of communication as "a socially interactive and subjective process of reality construction -through message - making and interpretation. Communication is process in dialectic. The musical structure extramusical history dialectic is one that is central to the study of human musicality in evolutionary, cross-cultural, and symbolic perspectives" (Feld 1984: 15).

shared evaluation. Both performer and listener engage in a performance, as “(...) ‘listening’ itself is a performance: to understand how musical pleasure, meaning, and evaluation work, we have to understand how, as listeners, we perform the music for ourselves” (Frith 1996: 204).

Performance is also constituted by a diversity of discourses relevant to its interpretation, since “its form and meaning index a broad range of discourse types, some of which are not framed as performance” (Bauman, Briggs 1996: 60-1), such as “past performances, readings of texts, negotiations, rehearsals, gossip, reports, critiques, challenges, subsequent performances and the like” (*idem*). The analysis and discussion of these speech events allows a critical reflection on musical value³ and meaning. On the one hand, my analytical emphasis⁴ emerged “from terminology used in the discourses which circulate around a song, style, or genre” (Brackett, 1995:18), especially by the singer-songwriters portrayed in this dissertation, their producers, musical critiques, journalists and fans.

On the other hand, gender plays an important role in both performance and its reception. The analysis of any musical practice as to consider how societal gender ideologies are intertwined/imbued and naturalized in musical creation and performance. As Frith pointed out, to perform “as a woman means something different than to perform for an audience as a man - different both in terms of the *social* connotations of what it means for a woman to show her body publicly, to pose, and in terms of the power play of sexual desire” (Frith 1996: 213). For centuries women’s bodies represented “objects of display”⁵ (McClary [1991], 2002: 138) and a woman’s voice and body, shown publicly on stage, is still frequently seen as a site of and for desire. This has obvious implications on women’s performances, since they are “inevitably much more self-conscious than a male performer” and they have to “keep redefining both [their] performing space and

³ “The more we know about how people listen to a piece of music, how they evaluate it, what they do with it, and the types of meanings they attribute to it, the clearer idea we can get of what is pertinent in a text” (Brackett 1995: 18).

⁴ “Ideally, analytical emphasis could arise from terminology used in the discourses which circulate around a song, style, or genre. These discourses give us a clue as to what codes are activated by the song, and to the range of possible connotations. These discourses could include ethnographic research which focused on statements of the fans themselves, gathered in face-to-face encounters; they would include written documents and interviews found in mass media publications, music industries magazines, historical documents, and ‘secondary literature’ such as biographies” (*idem*).

⁵ “(...) women's bodies in Western culture have almost always been viewed as objects of display. Women have rarely been permitted agency in art, but instead have been restricted to enacting - upon and through their bodies - the theatrical, musical, cinematic, and dance scenarios concocted by male artists” (McClary [1991] 2002: 138).

[their] performing narrative if [they want] to take charge of [their] situation” (1996: 213). The awareness that gender ideologies highly influence the way women performed led Ellen Koskoff (1987) to attempt a categorization of women’s musical performances through a gendered perspective. She defined four major categories:

“(1) performance that confirms and maintains the established social/sexual arrangement; (2) performance that appears to maintain established norms in order to protect other, more relevant values; (3) performance that protests, yet maintains, the order (often to symbolic behavior); and (4) performance that challenges and threatens established order” (Koskoff 1987: 10).

Although any type of generalization can be regarded as reductive, it may also help us to understand a specific case. In this research, this categorization proved to be a very useful analytical tool to better understand how each singer-songwriter shaped their performances to simultaneously consent and contest the “expected” behavior for a woman in the music industry.

Music as an art, and especially as a theoretical and academic field, is assumed to be gender neutral⁶. Most women in this field of work define themselves as “musicians”, understanding “musician” as an “identity category” above gender. Dusman describes exactly this situation by stating that “(...) ‘being musical’ is an identity that develops before a consciousness of sex (...) when discriminatory things happened to me, I didn’t identify them as being based on gender - I identify them as happening because (...) I needed to work harder in my music” (Diamond and Moisala 2010: 8).

⁶ “Music is generally regarded as a neutral - a *neuter* - enterprise, again because of the desire not to acknowledge its mediation through actual people with gendered bodies (...) Some women composers accept this position and write music that is indistinguishable from that of their male colleagues. Many of them chafe at the suggestion that their sexual identity might have something to do with their music, and understandably so: for centuries it has been thought that if women did write music, it would sound frail and passive - that is, would sound the way dominant culture assumed women were and should be” (McClary 2002: 139).

(...) an artist who composes and performs music and lyrics (with or without the assistance of other musicians) in light of which fact the listener believes he/she can discern the artist's personality, and values by paying close attention to lyrics, to how these are sung, and to their musical accompaniment, all to the prism of perceived authenticity. Our definition thus hinges on the singer-songwriter as a musical hermeneutic of the "listening process", and not as a cultural reality" (Marc, Green 2016: 9).

I begin with this quote because it synthesizes my own perception of what a singer-songwriter is. At a fundamental level, singer-songwriters are artists who write, compose and perform their own creations but, as Marc and Green suggest, there are multiple assumptions related to their value within popular music that are extremely hard to measure. In this research, I came to conclude that often singer-songwriters are associated with three main characteristics: they are "true" to their art as they follow their one path, regardless of the musical "mainstream"; they are "authentic", as their lyrics are perceived as personal - often autobiographical -, meaningful, socially and politically engaged, and their performances reflect "identities" or some of dimensions thereof; their art seems to be more important than their financial interests, even when they are professionals and need to be remunerated for their work. These characteristics are internalized and verbalized by listeners, the singer-songwriters I interviewed, agents and often by the press and specialized critics; all these perspectives help to crystallize and validate the image of singer-songwriters as pinnacles of musical creation.

At a time when music industries and listening habits changed dramatically, how do (pre)-conceptions about singers song-writers stand? I will start by discussing the concept that seems to connect all the others used to define singer-songwriters: authenticity⁷. As I referred, singer-songwriters are expected to be "authentic" in all

⁷ "(...) the concept of singer-songwriter continues to have strong connotations of greater authenticity and 'true' auteurship" (Shuker 2002: 277);

"Whilst the terms 'authenticity' and 'true' are often used within popular music studies, their precise meanings remain subjective and fluid, yet nearly always signifying quality and the highest of standards. The identification of authenticity with the figure of the singer-songwriter imbues him or her with this same quality. The entry by John Potter on singer-songwriters in the Grove Music Online Database reinforces these connotations" (Haworth 2013: 72).

aspects of their performances. But what does “authenticity” mean in this context? How can music and its performance be perceived as “authentic”? According to Marhsall (2006: 205-6):

“(…) authenticity is displayed through emotional sincerity: the performer's direct and personal address in the song is further individualized through the private forms of reception. (...) In other cases, authenticity is expressed through the performer's communication of solidarity with an audience.”

Taylor and Barker approach the issue by opposition: “What individuals understand by the word ‘authentic’ tends to be influenced by what exactly they perceived as fake, in a pejorative sense; seeing someone as authentic is thus often a moral judgment as well as an aesthetic one” (2007: 24). Within the same frame of thought, Moore proposes that “(…) authenticity does not inhere in any combination of musical sounds. ‘Authenticity’ is a matter of interpretation which is made and fought for from within a cultural and, thus, historicized position. It is ascribed, not inscribed” (Moore 2002: 210).

In the case of singer-songwriters, Moore suggests that attributes of “intimacy” and “immediacy (in the sense of unmediated forms of sound production) tend to connote authenticity” (*idem*: 211). In this context, the “authentic” performer “exhibits realism, lack of pretense” (*idem*). The concept can also be used in opposition to “commercial” musicians; in this sense, being primarily concerned with her/his art and audiences - instead of economic counterparts -, are central in the perception of a musician as “authentic”. Obviously this is an idealized view, since all professional singer-songwriters and musicians have to be “absorbed”, in one way or another, by the music industries. In Simon Frith’s view on “the different conventions of aesthetic value”, “*folk* music revolves around providing an authentic experience of community”, while “*popular* music values are created by and organized around the music industry (...) charts become the measure of ‘good’ pop music” (*in* Brackett 1995:19). I think singer-songwriters are positioned somewhere in the middle of these two categories: people expect them to have some success, so that they can continue working, but exceeding some abstract amount of economic value can be considered a “sell out” to the music industries.

Voice is a central theme in this research. I was especially interested in understanding how these singer-songwriters articulated the perception of their voices with their identities or dimensions thereof; how vocal variations could connect with biography; how their voices changed through time; and how they use it to communicate emotions and bond with listeners. I also wanted to better understand the reception of these voices: what do listeners feel and think when they listen to them?; how do they imagine the body and person producing the voice?; and how do they create discourse about a voice and what that voice means? In sum, understanding the singing voice as a “creative act and process [that] provokes and activates memory and perception, enabling an encounter (conscious or unconscious) with self and others” (Hellier 2013: 3). Singing and listening exist in a continuous and fluid interaction once a performer understands the impact of his/her voice when confronted with the listeners’ response to it. The response to a singing voice is hard to analyze, since it is shaped by a multiplicity of variables, ranging from musical contexts and tastes to personal connection and identification with the singer’s persona or with some particularity in his/her singing voice.

Vocal characteristics are frequently understood as biological, but a great deal of someone’s voice is culturally constructed, as the result of social interactions and part of the fluid nature of constructing identity (Jarman-Ivens 2011: 3-23). This is why one person’s voice may change greatly in different contexts, especially between public and private spaces. The voice is also implicitly connected to a person’s identity: like a fingerprint, in a juridical perspective, it can be used in courts of law to identify a person (Frith 1996: 191-7). At a cultural and social level, voice may index gender, place, class and education (Feld *et al.* 2004). Being produced by a living body, it is also a vehicle for conveying emotions and states of mind.

The word voice is also a metaphor⁸ that stands for someone’s power to express social and political messages, a space of expression and influence within societies. Feld and Fox (2000: 161) link expressions such as “having voice” and “giving voice” to the

⁸ Eileen Hayes has observed that “in the late 1980s and early 1990s scholars from across disciplines invoked ‘voice’ as a metaphor for vocality, cultural agency, political autonomy, and both individual and collective power” (2006, 72). As a metaphor, voice has been a particular feature of feminist movements to express notions of empowerment. In feminist music criticism, voice “became an essential term to reference women’s articulations and communications” (Hellier 2013: 5).

“politics of identity, to the ability of the subaltern to speak, to the ability of indigeneity movements to ‘talk back’ and class, gender, and race politics to ‘back talk’ the dominant.”

The singer-songwriter’s figure overlaps multiples voices, being the most obvious the authorial⁹ and performative/physical voice. As authors, singer-songwriters are expected to articulate meaningful messages with music; their creative voice is, in some cases, more important to listeners than their singing technique. In Portugal, the singer-songwriters who emerged as voices of protest during and after dictatorship are highly valued for their agency, materialized in songs. Some still make music and perform it, often with no political or social agendas; yet, people seem to listen to them more as creators than as singers. This is not valid for all singer-songwriters, specifically to women singer songwriters who may be equally committed to such agencies: women continue to be associated with singing more than with authorship. This is quite obvious when we see, in the media - in publications titles, TV interviews, and even specialized newspaper articles - references to their work not as authors and musical interpreters (as most of them are) but “simply” as singers.

Lyrics: From domestic to public spheres

“There’s this laborious work, in the history of women, to speak about something without naming it. It can be a poetic delicacy but it can also be motivated by conformity - women were never the protagonists - and they got accustomed to say without saying. The use of a symbolic language remains as an historical memory” (Judite Canha Fernandes¹⁰, personal communication, 18-01-2017).

Poetry written by women often exposes - more implicitly than explicitly - multiple axes of oppression, and music lyrics are no exception. Throughout history, the content of such poems served as ways to transfer knowledge, prepare and advertise other women

⁹ According to Frith (1996: 184): “(...) the authorial voice can be more or less distinctive; we may recognize - respond to - that voice (Cole Porter, Elvis Costello, Morrissey, P. J. Harvey) even when reading a lyric. ‘Voice’ in this sense describes a sense of personality that doesn’t involve shifters at all, but is familiar as the special way a person has with words: we immediately know who’s speaking.”

¹⁰ Judite Canha Fernandes is a writer and women’s rights activist and scholar.

and children about life in all its dimensions. Tullia Magrini's overview of northern Italian ballads¹¹ concludes the following:

“Ballads are mainly concerned with stories of women and in particular with the representation of the dangers coming from men (abduction, rape, murder, betrayal, mistreatment, abandonment), with the terrible consequences coming from a conflict with family or authority for questions of love (imprisonments, death) or from breaking the law, and virtuous female behavior (...) Within this context, ballad singing was the most important instrument that women had to reflect upon themselves and their relationship with society, and to construct their identity” (Magrini 2003: 4).

Another genre associated with women (in some regions exclusively) is the lament performed primarily in funerals, but transformed and “performed in the weddings to express the bride's fear of the perils ahead when she leaves her home [in Eastern Europe]; In Corsica, lament formulas were often borrowed and adapted as lullabies” (Koskoff in Rice *et al*, 2000: 132-96). Many folk songs express women's expectations and disappointments in their relations with the opposite sex, societal and religious norms and rules of conduct. But those reflections/messages were frequently encrypted or veiled through the use of metaphors and signs located within specific time and space. I am invoking these musical genres for two reasons: firstly, the women that performed ballads and laments (among other “folk” styles) were, in a way, singer-songwriters,¹² as they composed new melodies, new lyrics and performed them mostly in private contexts; secondly, because the poetry written by the singer-songwriters I present in this research - inevitably linked to what Judite Canha calls “historical memory” - is marked by the frequent and elaborated use of stylistic resources such as metaphor and symbolism used to express, contest and provoke societal asymmetries and oppressions. In the singer-songwriters case, lyrics:

“(...) are perceived as meaningful. That is to say, they must be deemed to convey some kind of “philosophical”, social, psychological or emotional meanings - a perceived “inner truth” - by means of the referential and emotive functions of the language they

¹¹ A common genre in European countries, especially in the Mediterranean.

¹² Given the oral transmission of such songs it is often impossible to determinate their origins, but surely many were composed by women.

employ. (...) Moreover, lyrics are performed by the singer-songwriter such that the song - so the listener infers - reveals something about his/her personality and values. Key to this inference is that the singer-songwriter is assumed to harmonize what David Brackett (1995: 15) and Frith (1996: 199) refer to as the ‘multiplicity of voices’ heard simultaneously, in music” (Marc, Green 2016: 7).

Research Problem

This research is about the life and music of four musicians that compose, perform and often produce their work. As women singer-songwriters they carry out their musical activities mainly in Portugal, within different musical genres. I explore the relationship of musical and literary creation to biography, political and social contexts, agency and gender; describe and analyze aspects of performance - voice, movement, style, relation with the audience; public and “private” discourse by and about these singer-songwriters and their music by critics, journalists, listeners, fans, agents, musicians and producers. My first strategy was to immerse myself in field and archival work on these singer-songwriters and the “life” that revolves around them, and to let the specific questions emerge from the data. I listened to recordings, read published interviews, participated in concerts, watched music videos, interviewed and talked informally to the singer-songwriters and the people who work for and with them and to other people about their music, voices and listeners musical “tastes”. Throughout this process, I explored the four singers - songwriters’ life-histories, creative processes and artistic careers, in particular the impact of gender on music creation and performance and on relations with music industries, media and audiences. Drawing on this research, I address the following questions:

- 1) How do these singer-songwriter’s biographies impact their creative processes? How are their life stories transformed by those processes?
- 2) How are gender, musical creation and performance articulated?
- 3) How does gender mediate power relations with musical industries, media and audiences?
- 4) How do these singer-songwriters poetic writing, physical and metaphorical voice constitute agency¹³?

¹³ Agency is here used in the sense of exercising political influence through music.

My interest in the study of music and gender, centering specifically on women singer songwriters, was informed by the fact that songwriting in Portugal continues to be more associated with men, women being seen mostly as singers. Thanks to the continuous work of these and other authors, the public perception is gradually changing and other women develop careers as singer-songwriters. I opted for focusing on four case studies representing different generations, styles, creative processes and approaches to performance. Mafalda Veiga has had the longest career as a “pop” singer-songwriter in Portugal. Her debut album dates from 1987 and, since then, she was able to maintain a large, committed group of fans and listeners who attend her concerts massively and support the promotion of her work. Like other long careers, she experienced major challenges, especially after the success of her first album and her first single, a song that became a “signature tune” (Marshall 2006: 199). Her persistence and the way she relates closely with audiences, through intimate performances are noteworthy. Rita Redshoes was an author I had never been compelled to listen to, until I heard the song “Bad Lila”. The ambiguity of the lyrics and vocal performance made me realize that her compositions could be hiding strong motivations and meaningful messages regarding identity and gender questions. Being a mainstream singer-songwriter, I was interested in understanding how she would mediate her creative impulses and political beliefs with an aesthetic and discourse that are attractive to the largest group of people possible. In Capicua’s case - the first woman rapper in Portugal to achieve public notoriety, creating music that combines an informed and reflexive feminist discourse using an emancipating musical genre -, I wanted to understand in what ways is she actively transforming the public conscience on social questions, especially on gender issues. Aline Frazão, as I initially knew her work, was in the realm of “world music”, until she profoundly changed her image, sound and performance; what reasons motivated this change? Her three albums reflect different levels of oppression - mainly within race and gender stereotypes -, and inner perspectives on Angolan culture and the country’s current regime.

This dissertation consists of four case studies grounded in Rice's theorization of a "Subject-Centered Musical Ethnography". From this ethnographic perspective, "the subject, self, or individual around whom musical ethnography may be centered is a thoroughly social and self-reflexive being" (Rice 2003: 156). The study of individuals allows the ethnographer to focus on their uniqueness, their "agency and difference" (Ruskin, Rice 2012: 299) and to provide "some narrative coherence" to the "seemingly fragmented world that many social theorists, cultural critics, and ethnomusicologists are writing about" (Rice 2003: 157). Placing biography, self-reflexivity and the interaction between subjects sharing the same "three dimensional space of musical experience"¹⁴ (idem: 158) at the core of ethnomusicological research, Rice's model allows for a dynamic and fluid perspective on "individual musicians who are trying to make sense of collapsing worlds, create new individual identities, and knit themselves into emerging or newly encountered social formations" (Ruskin, Rice 2012: 299).

In order to draw holistic perspectives of the singer-songwriters portrayed in this dissertation, my analytical emphasis was grounded in the triangulation of three main axes: musical/poetic creation and performance, biographical/self-reflexive experiences, and the discourses surrounding them. These axes are interconnected through a narrative that can be placed within a dialogic technique. Within this method, "constructed dialogue" between the researcher and his/her interlocutors "reveals the tone and content of local discourses about music" (Ruskin, Rice 2012: 314). My narrative is therefore interspersed with excerpts from direct interviews and quotes drawn from various sources, bringing together field and archival research. My main goal was to center the research subjects in the ethnographic writing, shaping the narrative through their subjectivities, concerns and agency.

The study and analysis of music performance was a continuous exercise, that took into account a multiplicity of aspects such as "musical and extra musical behavior of participants (performers and audiences), the consequent social interaction, the meaning of that interaction for participants, and the rules and codes of performance" (Behágue 1984: 7) from a gendered, self-reflexive perspective. This approach to an ethnography

¹⁴ Rice's three-dimensional model considers time, location and metaphor. Within this perspective, musical experience and ethnography share the same space, and subjects and ethnographer "operate in similar spaces of the same structure" (Rice 2003: 173).

of performance follows Behague's premise that "the concept of performance practice needs to be expanded and that the study of performance is inseparable from musical analysis as a whole, regardless of the specific tradition or of the historical period under consideration" (Behague 2006: 11). In order to allow for an in-depth understanding of the case studies, my fieldwork included participant-observation in concerts, workshops and events featuring singer-songwriters, interviews with listeners, fans, authors and other musical agents, as well as online research. In addition, I analyzed recorded music and music videos, poetry, written documents and interviews published in the media, album notes, photographs and other "products" released by the author's production managers.

Gender related questions were complex. The majority of the songwriters I interviewed (not only the ones portrayed in this dissertation) were reluctant to talk about personal aspects of their lives, realities and fictions in their lyrics or gender related biographical aspects revealed in songs. This was a sensitive topic for most of them, but as our conversations deepened, many of the narratives revolved around gender issues. Since the political dimension of gender is at the core - in a more or less conscious way - of all aspects of musical performance, it became the focus of our interchange. Gender became a central issue¹⁵, a dimension that as Herndon points out in her pioneering work "should be regarded as a basic, dynamic field within which meaning may vary" (Herndon *in* Moisala, Diamond 2010: 350). Through a gendered perspective, I try to show the fluidity and subtlety through which social constructions of gender affect - and are affected by - music making and performance. The fragmented discourses and narratives resulting from this approach reveal a view of culture constituted by "partial truths" (Ruskin, Rice 2012: 314), shaped by gender, ethnicity and social position. Individuals are seen as "agents who give meaning to - and change - social, cultural and musical systems in specific instances" (*idem*: 309).

¹⁵ Gender perspectives are necessary to understand all musical processes, although they are often overlooked in music studies, since "masculine" is still the universal neutral. This is an essential matter since, as stated by Karen Carpenter: "The dominant ideologies of gender are such that, in popular culture as a whole, that which is perceived and produced as 'masculine' enjoys widespread hegemony over that which is described and produced as 'feminine'" (*in* Jarman-Ivens 2011: 65).

As a composer and performer (for some years, also a singer-songwriter), it was impossible not to reflect upon and compare my findings with my own experiences. I realized how deeply the “encounter”¹⁶ with these singer-songwriters had changed me and I questioned myself whether I, as a researcher, also changed the people I connected with. I cannot speak for all of them, but I can say that some expressed how differently they listen to a singing voice after we made that “exercise” together, or how their perspectives about songwriting, performance and gender changed following our conversations. As I read my field notes and interviews, I realized how emotionally attached I became to these women’s music and life stories, since their challenges resonated with the problem I faced and still face in my musical career: I have to constantly prove that my work is “good”. This has been a reality since my graduation from the ESMAE¹⁷ in 2005 - where I was the only woman among composition teachers and students -, not because of the work itself, but because feelings of distrust towards women creators remain deeply ingrained.¹⁸ I have to think how expressing my artistic motivations and opinions on different matters will be interpreted by other musicians, music agents and listeners, how my shyness and discomfort on stage - motivated by years of work devaluation, by others and consequently, by myself -, may index mediocrity; why, when I work with male musicians, they always seem extremely surprised because my music is “good”, or “difficult”, or “interesting”; and, when I play piano publicly, I always remember a man who once told me “you play like a guy” - he meant it as a compliment. I am not claiming the singer-songwriters in this research share all of these experiences and feelings. Nevertheless, I identify and closely relate with their narratives.

During my fieldwork, I attended multiple concerts by these and other singer-songwriters. The contexts where they occurred changed my critical position as an audience member. When the singer-songwriters presented themselves in venues with paid entrances, people reacted often enthusiastically, not just to the music being performed but also to the discourses between songs. When the concerts were part of “popular” festivities,

¹⁶ Ruskin and Rice “use the term ‘encounter’ to imply a relationship between researcher and subject that shapes the possibilities of research and the narrative that emerges from it” (2013: 310).

¹⁷ Escola Superior de Música e das Artes do Espetáculo [Superior School of Music and Performing Arts].

¹⁸ “In all known societies, men’s actions receive higher value and prestige than those of women (...) Carol Robertson (1984: 451 *in* Koskoff 1987:14) echoes this by stating that the domain of value is “perhaps the most elusive and most significant motivator of human interaction, meanings and performances”.

especially outside urban centers, I always felt nervous for the artists on stage, since the audiences were often unresponsive and showed little or no interest in what was happening. In my own concerts, the audience “apathy” led me to believe that people were not enjoying the music or that they “distrusted” my competence as a musician. It was extremely hard to keep performing in these situations, and I imagine that for these authors and performers this is also a challenge. Nevertheless, these women “fight” to “win” the audience, and are aware that their presence in such events requires a certain degree of entertainment, as they try to address the audience in a relaxed way or make some remarks about the place and the people for whom they are performing. Sometimes I heard men’s voices screaming misogynist comments and the singer-songwriters always had a fast sentence to respond to it. These situations triggered my memory to similar experiences I had on stage, and I felt extremely uncomfortable and angry. Although these singer-songwriters try to present themselves as competent musicians, dressing and performing soberly, it is very clear that often “Women on the stage are viewed as sexual commodities regardless of their appearance or seriousness” (McClary 1991: 161).

The narratives presented in these dissertation are shaped by all the events I experienced as a composer, performer and researcher. Although I assume that my “self” is “a source of knowledge” (Ruskin, Rice 2012: 310), my approach highlights the dialogic relation I established with my interlocutors, and through their discourses attempted to “give” them “voice”. In sum, my approach to an ethnography of performance “moves between the subjectivities of the audience, the performers, the ethnographer, and others” (Wong 2008 :78).

Summary of chapter contents

Chapter I presents the theoretical framework, the methodological strategy that support my research, and key concepts: music performance and gender; singer-songwriter and “authenticity”; voice; lyrics. I also discuss the dialogical relation I established with my interlocutors, my motivations and subjectivities as researcher and composer/performer. Chapter II addresses Mafalda Veiga’s biography and artistic trajectory. It consists of two parts: the first is dedicated to contextualizing and analyzing her first album

“Pássaros do Sul” [“Birds from the south”] published in 1987. The fast and unexpected success of this work led me to question: How does this album relate to the Portuguese political and social context? How did its success influence the reception of the albums that followed? The second part of this chapter, provides a stylistic and performative overview of what can be considered a second period in her career, starting in 1996 with the album “A cor da Fogueira” [“The color of the bonfire”]. Since then, Veiga established an uncommonly strong and intimate bond with her audience, which raises the following questions: By what means do her fans actively support and invigorate her career? How does the singer-songwriter nourish and promote this close relation?

Chapter III focuses on Rita Redshoes. My analysis was initially confined to her recorded performances - albums and music videos - and their relation with her biographical and public discourse. The singer-songwriter’s work, and her discourse about it, allows reflection on how a woman composer and performer is constantly mediating gender power relations through her music and performance. As a “pop-star”¹⁹ she needs to veil her feminist intentions in order to maintain a large, heterogeneous group of followers. Taking this into account, how does she use and articulate voice, lyrics, music and image to “camouflage” intentions and meanings? In order to answer this question, I analyzed the above mentioned dimensions of her compositions and performance, especially in what I consider to be the “feminist” songs in her repertoire: “Bad Lila”, “Woman Snake” and “Vestido” [“Dress”].

Chapter IV, features the rapper Capicua with the aim of characterizing the multiple voices in which the author describes and questions women's issues and gender asymmetries. After a brief introduction describing her professional and biographical trajectory, I attempted to group some of her songs according to the content of the lyrics. In these examples, the singer-songwriter deconstructs historical and social axes of oppression, questioning normative behavior through the use of a provocative and empowering discourse. Mostly using Capicua’s words, I analyze the lyrics’ content of the song “Medusa” that, as in the song “Vestido” by Rita Redshoes, addresses an rare theme in “popular music”: that of sexual and domestic violence against women.

Chapter V, dedicated to Aline Frazão, attempts to draw a biographical cartography, based on her recorded albums, through the combined analysis of biography, voice, music and lyrics, performance, discourses and field work in live concerts. The radical

¹⁹ Rita Redshoes is constantly referred to as a pop star and singer and rarely as a composer. In all the media articles I consulted, never the word singer-songwriter was associated with her name.

changes in Aline's music and sound (especially between her second and third album's), image (changing from a "girlish" look, to a more androgynous figure²⁰) and attitude in concerts and interviews (from a smiley relaxed posture to a more tough expression), led me to question the reasons behind it: were these radical transformations motivated by the search for a new musical aesthetic or the result of a growing political and gender activism? How does Aline Frazão, a woman of mixed African and Portuguese origin reacts, through her music and performances, to the various layers of oppression to which she is subjected?

In the last chapter, I present my conclusions based on these case studies, highlighting the perspectives and challenges these women face in the music industry. Also, I reflect on how gender appears to affect and provoke several aspects of music making and performance.

²⁰ Long curly hair, wearing skirts and colorful patterns to short hair, straight trousers, blouses buttoned to the neck and Dr. Martens boots.

Chapter II

Persistent intimacy: Mafalda Veiga

Mafalda Veiga is one of the first women singer-songwriters to achieve media exposure and notoriety in Portuguese popular music²¹. Her debut album “Pássaros do Sul”²² [“Birds from the south”], published in 1987, was a commercial hit, and the song “Planície” [“Lowland”] became an iconic song. In the following years, the singer-songwriter, who had no background in performing in concerts and music studios, experienced multiple challenges: she was ridiculed in a comic sketch, criticized by public opinion and neglected by her label that gave little or no editorial support to her second and third albums²³. Nevertheless, she persevered and nowadays she is supported by a large, eclectic group of devoted fans. Her pioneering role was crucial for the following generations of women singer-songwriters in the Portuguese music industry.

In this chapter, I will focus on her first album “Pássaros do Sul”. Through an analysis of her music and poetry, as well as the author’s and producer’s discourse, I will try to demonstrate how the album relates to the Portuguese social and political context in 1987. I will briefly present an biographical account, stressing especially issues of gender and gender bias that are relevant for contextualizing her songs. I will also reflect upon the “social character of the musical communication” (Feld, 1984: 6) through the analysis of the importance Mafalda’s fans have in the process of constructing and maintaining her career. Listeners are “implicated” as “socially and historically situated being[s]” (*idem*), playing an essential role in sharing, promoting and (re)interpreting meanings in both private and public contexts. During the past thirty years, the singer-songwriter was able to establish and nourish - particularly through lyrics and performance - an intimate relationship with her listeners and fans.

²¹ Dina is the most well known singer-songwriter in Portuguese popular music before Mafalda Veiga. She recorded her first album “Dinamite” [“Dynamite”] in 1982, and became publicly noted through her participation in the Eurovision contests in 1980, 1982 and 1992 (Miguel Almeida *in* Castelo-Branco 2010: 380-81).

²² The album obtained the silver record distinction, the equivalent to ten thousand copies sold, one month after its release.

²³ According to an interview I conducted with Manuel Faria (22-05-2017), musician in the band “Trovante” and musical producer of Veiga’s first three albums’s.

“Pássaros do Sul” (1987) | Social and biographical context

Mafalda Veiga grew up in the region of Alentejo in southern Portugal. Between 1975 and 1981 her parents and four brothers and sisters were forced to move to Spain. After the Portuguese revolution, in 1974, agricultural workers in the region of Alentejo started occupying large land properties [latifúndios] owned by single families. In this region, organized and dominated by a few landowners, Agrarian Reform [Reforma Agrária] was massive and often included confrontation between landowners and agricultural workers. The occupation was led by small farmers and seasonal precarious workers. Backed by the state, political parties and syndicates, they formed Collective Production Units (UCP's “Unidade Coletivas de Produção” [Collective Unites of Production]). According to the sociologist António Barreto, between the 25th of April 1974 and the 30th of June 1980 “one million hectares were occupied and expropriated” (Barreto 1983: 513). The beginning of the eighties was marked by the decline of the Portuguese Agrarian Reform, during the negotiations that allowed Portugal to become a full member of the CEE.²⁴

The property owned by Mafalda's family, in Montemor o Novo village, was also occupied. Mafalda was nine years old and remembers the day her family had to leave to Spain:

“I remember us being very small and always running away because suddenly something was happening (...) in Alentejo things were very aggressive and I remember us being stopped by Copcom,²⁵ flashlights peeking inside the car. I remember all that, but it's like seeing a film, I was very young to understand it. My parents had a concerned look but we were very protected (...) they explained everything gently” (Mafalda Veiga, personal interview, 5-06-2017).

Although her parents struggled to rebuild their lives in a foreign country²⁶, Veiga felt she was living in a safe “cocoon”. She entered a religious school, quickly learnt Spanish and remembers the support she got from her fourth grade teacher. Now, she values this life changing experience, that allowed her to learn another language: “I don't look at

²⁴ Comunidade Económica Europeia [European Economical Community], today European Union.

²⁵ Comando Operacional do Continente [Continental Operational Command], constituted by specialized military forces and formed after the Portuguese revolution.

²⁶ According to the author, her family left without financial support and Mafalda's father had to find a job in Spain.

things with any kind of sorrow, things happen the way they should; many times, what you are forced to do enhances your life” (Mafalda Veiga, personal interview, 5-06-2017).

In 1981 her family returned to Alentejo. For Veiga, an adolescent at the time, this was a “reencounter with her childhood”:

“Intact, all that landscape reminded me of my childhood and the people that were part of it (...). All this overwhelmed me, it was very strong... that landscape was like a person, all I could see around me moved like human beings; everything had memories, like paintings. It was very important to write that album [“Pássaros do Sul”], it was a work made of my *saudade* [longing]. Half the album is that, half is not, I think” (Mafalda Veiga, personal interview, 05-06-2017).

When she was nineteen years old, a friend of the family encouraged her to record some of her songs and show them to record publishers. Within months, she had a contract with EMI-VC, the largest Portuguese record company²⁷. The musician Manuel Faria produced her album. But why did EMI-VC decide to invest in a young, inexperienced singer song-writer? Manuel Faria and Mafalda Veiga herself couldn’t answer this question. A brief historical note provides the context for this decision.

After the Portuguese revolution in 1974, Valentim de Carvalho had to rethink its positioning in the music market because some of their artists were related to “Nacional-Cançonetismo²⁸” and, for that, was rapidly losing audience to politically engaged singers song-writers who composed protest songs. In the late seventies, the published repertoire changed, allowing “the ascension of Portuguese rock” and later the “publication of groups or musicians associated with Portuguese Popular Music, like Trovante and Vitorino²⁹” (Losa in Castelo-Branco 2010: 1306). Within this context, Mafalda Veiga’s music suited the label’s direction of producing original and acoustic

²⁷ In 1983, the Portuguese label Valentim de Carvalho (VC) signed with the multinational company EMI and formed the conglomerate EMI-VC (Losa in Castelo-Branco 2010: 1304-8).

²⁸ Depreciative expression of the musical style conveyed by singers associated with the musical production of the Emissora Nacional [National Radio]. The songs connoted with the national songbook were “superficial, fake and propagandistic, often using patriotic themes” [“superficiais, fúteis e propagandísticas, recorrendo frequentemente a temáticas patrióticas”] (António João César in Castelo-Branco 2010: 901).

²⁹ “(...) enveredaram pela edição de grupos e intérpretes associados à Música Popular Portuguesa como Trovante e Vitorino” (Losa in Castelo-Branco 2010: 1306).

music sung in Portuguese³⁰. Furthermore, Veiga's lyrics were intricate and sophisticated but simultaneously accessible to a diversified audience, using words and poetic images drawn from "popular culture". Internationally, women singer-songwriters (that we can easily relate to Mafalda Veiga's aesthetics and style) were emerging, for example, Suzanne Vega³¹ and Sinead O'Connor³²; others like Joni Mitchell, Kate Bush, Carole King and Carli Simon had notorious careers.

After signing with EMI-VC, the process of recording her first album was extremely fast. Manuel Faria received an unexpected phone call from someone in VC inviting him to produce an "unusual girl", a "tricky thing with a lot of future" (Manuel Faria, personal interview 22-05-2017). The producer immediately realized the singer-songwriter's musical potential. But her lack of experience in live performances and recording studios led him to assume a protective role in the beginning of her career:

"We invested everything in Mafalda. We protected her. She was shielded in the structure we set up for her shows because she was very fragile (...). What she represented, as an artist, was something new and had a lot of fragility" (Manuel Faria, personal interview 22-05-2017).

Although Manuel Faria described Mafalda Veiga as a "very special author", a "gemstone", creator of defying and "innovative" music, he also recurrently emphasized her "fragility". This paradoxical view, I suppose, is informed by the singer-songwriter's gender, young age, lack of experience and extreme shyness. His protective attitude reflects the male dominated space of the music industry and a frame of thought, where women composers and performers were exceptions³³. Although Mafalda Veiga regrets

³⁰ "I recall that, at the time, the publishers pressured her [Mafalda] to sing in Portuguese [she also wrote in Spanish]" (Manuel Faria, personal interview, 22-05-2017).

³¹ The album "Solitude Standing" was released in 1987 and occupied the first place in Portuguese record sales.

³² The album "The lion and the cobra" was also released in 1987.

³³ This naturalized behavior or "compulsion to protect" is transversal to male producers and musicians that work with the majority of the singer-songwriters I interviewed, even the ones who are not referenced in this work. The sexism in this situation appears to relate to the traditional division between active/passive subject, that naturalizes "male" as protective and "female" as fragile. According to Whiteley (2000: 10 in Hellier 2013: 6-7), in her study of women singer-songwriters and musicians in the United Kingdom: "in the 1970s an identification of the separation of the domestic and public sphere was the most significant boundary in society, reflecting the conventional split between career and family (...) [the] traditional tug between domestic/public, passive/active that characterized gendered identity continued to create a conflict of interest for women performers (...)."

the timing of her first recording and tour because she had to learn “by doing,” and she was publically exposed prematurely,³⁴ describing the process as “painful” and “frightening”, she never felt fragile. Her discomfort in the studio and on stage - “an unbearable agony”³⁵ - somehow mirrors societal thought that accentuates feelings of insecurity and not consentaneous feelings with being a “very special author”. The “fragility” that her producer associated with her work and performance seemed to influence her persona, reflecting the paradox of being a “gemstone” and, simultaneously, feeling anxious and insecure. Subtle oppressions are frequently internalized and hard to recognize, especially when masked by “protective” actions and feelings. Mafalda Veiga’s description of her work space and environment reflects the constant power mediation between her and the male staff she worked with:

“Sometimes I would say: ‘I want to invite this or that person to play in the album’ and he would say [Manuel Faria]: ‘I’ll phone, I’ll do it’... because he liked to control my actions. I never felt fragile. I simply wasn’t aware of many things and I trusted. But that was not because of fragility (...) I was young and Manuel had a huge influence over me: a musician from a famous band, that knew a lot of things in the studio... And there was also this deceptive school, by technicians and producers: if you wanted to do something that implied a lot of work they would say that it was not possible. I am a very curious person and, through the years, I could see that a lot of those things I asked for were, in fact, possible” (Mafalda Veiga, personal interview, 05-06-2017).

The unconditional trust in someone who was musically more experienced and, in this case an “ally”, led Mafalda Veiga to abdicate her power of decision and control. When “control” is negotiated between opposed genders in a heavily male-dominated space, women often cooperate with the decisions taken, even if they don’t agree with them.

³⁴ “I took some time to enjoy being in the studio, in the beginning it was frightening. The first album was a bit scary, everything was new to me” (Mafalda Veiga, personal interview, 16-05-2016).

³⁵ “When I started playing, I was very nervous and it was a sacrifice to go on stage... I only did it because I felt pleasure in having a goal... it was an unbearable agony (...)” (Mafalda Veiga, personal interview, 05-06-2017).

The Songs

Mafalda Veiga's first album ("Pássaros do Sul", 1987) was the result of a few years of composing songs for the sheer pleasure of music making, with no publishing expectations. The long period between compositions explains, in a way, the heterogeneity of poetic ideas and musical compositions; connecting them, there's a specific mood or feeling, transversal to most songs in this album. Through the use of words that describe bucolic and often brutal images from a pastoral landscape, "Passáros do Sul" inspires or suggests nostalgia, allowing individual idealizations of Portuguese agrarian life in Alentejo. In the following overview, I will briefly describe relevant characteristics for the songs relating more directly to the Portuguese social context in 1987.

Track one, "Velho" ["Old man"], composed when Mafalda Veiga was seventeen years old, was the first song she wrote in Portuguese. The poem is written in a realistic way, describing the image of an old man seated in a park bench with a "sad look", "remembering fragments of the past". When we discussed the realism and poetic "rawness" of the narrative, the singer-songwriter made the following remarks:

"I remember seeing them [old men, on her way to school] and it always choked me... and at that age, one writes in a brutal way. You say things without euphemisms... firstly because you are at the peak of your immortality; then, because things that affect you also disturb you... and you still have the ingenuity to believe that you can change the world" (Mafalda Veiga, personal interview, 5-06-2017).

Also in the lyrics, the author describes the surrounding environment through sound, using what I consider to be an ironic reference to her own song and performance: "An old song was playing on the radio, a [male] young singer talked about solitude"³⁶. She then dismantles the description asking the young singer³⁷: "What do you know about the singing,³⁸ about only being like this / Alone and abandoned, like the old man in the garden?". It doesn't matter to whom the question is formulated, rather the self-

³⁶ "Na telefonia tocava uma velha canção / e um jovem cantor falava da solidão (...)"

³⁷ "Que sabes tu do canto de estar só assim / só e abandonado como o velho do jardim?"

³⁸ In Portuguese, the word "canto" means "singing and corner. The use of homonymous words is a frequent expressive resource in this song. The same resource is employed in the word "só", used here with the double meaning of *only* and *alone*.

awareness it reflects and provokes. Mafalda Veiga is portraying solitude and indifference, simultaneously asking what does the singer - or the listener - really know about this feeling. Although the author will continue to portray social issues in other songs,³⁹ the poetic “realism” and fatalistic view of existence present in this poem is unique in the singer-songwriter’s work. Musically, the song starts with two contrasting elements that overlap, reinforce the lyrics references to the past and the future: chords played by the synthesizer - using a register similar to a harpsichord - are repeated in a constant, obsessive beat (like a ticking clock); a conflicting layer is added by the electric guitar player, performing an unexpected solo in a rock style⁴⁰. The emotional content of the poem can be felt in the intensity of the singer-songwriter’s “raw”, “loud” voice, a register that is distinct from that used in the other tracks in the album, and that can be read as the expression of a protest. Lonely and elderly men reflect the image of an aging country, haunted by the memory of long colonial wars. Motivated by the memory of these conflicts or even by the singer-songwriter’s experience following the Portuguese revolution, two poems focusing on the war had an emotional impact on Mafalda Veiga. She felt compelled to set them to music: “Menino de sua mãe” [“Your mother’s boy”] (Track two) and “Balada de um soldado” [“A soldiers ballad”] (Track six). The first song was set to Fernando Pessoa’s poem that the singer-songwriter had studied in high school:

(...)
De balas trespassado / - Duas, de lado a lado -,
Jaz morto e arrefece. (...)
Lá longe, em casa, há a prece: / “Que volte cedo, e bem!”
Malhas que o império tece! / Jaz morto, e apodrece,
O menino da sua mãe.

(...)
Pierced by bullets/ - Two, from one side to the other -,
Lies death, cool as ice (...)
Far away, at home, the prayer: / “That he will comeback soon, and well!”
Nets weaved by the empire! / Lies death and rots,
Her mother’s boy.

The brutality of this narrative is not matched by Veiga’s musical composition. The singer-songwriter’s proposal is based on the contrast between words and music. The song starts with a small and “light” introduction in C Major, leading us subtly to A minor (tonic). This melodic introduction is repeated four times which, together with the

³⁹ Other examples include: “Pedras e flores” [“Stones and flowers”] album “Cantar” [“Sing”] 1988; “Vertigem” [“Vertigo”], álbum “Nada se repete” [“Nothing is repeatable”], 1992; “Outro dia que amanhece” [“Another day that dawns”], album “A cor da fogueira” [“The color of the bonfire”] 1996; “Lado a lado” [Side by side], album “Tatuagem” [“Tattoo”] 1999; “Antes da escuridão” [“Before darkness”] album “Chão” [“Gound”] 2008.

⁴⁰ Manuel Faria mentioned briefly the criticism surrounding this musical option.

saxophone solo in the middle and end of the song, helps to relieve the tension produced by the words and by the singer-songwriter's intense vocal interpretation. Several other composers set the same poem to music.⁴¹ They employed similar resources - such as diminished chords or intervals, unusual modulations and disrupted melodies - none present in Veiga's song.

"Balada de un soldado" is an anonymous Spanish poem. The text was given to her by a friend in Spain when she was fourteen years old and she kept it for years. It narrates the story of a soldier that killed a friend in combat:

(...)
Una luz iluminó / El rostro que yo mataba
Clavó su mirada en mí / Con sus ojos ya vacíos
Madre, sabes quien maté? / Aquél soldado enemigo
Era mi amigo José / Compañero de la escuela
Con quien tanto yo jugué / De soldados y
trincheras

(...)
Light showed / The face I killed
He looked at me / With empty eyes
Mom, do you who I killed? That enemy soldier
Was my friend, José / My classmate
With whom I played so much / soldiers and
trenches

Musically, this song differs greatly from the previous examples. It is a "dense" composition in D minor, where the arrangement reinforces the context of conflict, through the use of referential sounds associated with war and death: church bells (used in the beginning and end of the song); undefined synthesized sounds; a martial rhythmic pattern in the snare drums; a military band (emerging at the end of the piece). It results in a descriptive, almost cinematographic narrative, where music and lyrics accentuate the tragedy of the situation. The close relation that the singer-songwriter maintains with the visual arts is also felt in the songs Restolho ["Haulm"] and "Planície", in which she creates "visual" poems inspired by Alentejo's landscapes through the use of symbolism and metaphor.

Restolho (track number three) is one of the most successful songs in Veiga's repertoire and people frequently ask her to perform it in concerts⁴². Audiences sing along, by heart. The song begins with a slow, circular arpeggio (D major), played in a twelve strings guitar. This element sets a peaceful, "bucolic" mood through repetition, mixing (by the use of reverb to enhance the musical motive and its "metallic" timbre), and the

⁴¹ Luís Cília set this poem to a ballad in a minor key (F#) using harmonic progressions based on diminished fifths. Carlos Mendes also set the same poem to music in *fado* style, also starting in a minor key, creates a "hopeful" section in a major key, when referring to the family expectations for the soldier's return. Lopes-Graça's in his setting of this song uses dissonance to emphasize the narrated tragedy.

⁴² "Restolho" is often played in concerts as an encore.

imitation of the timbre of Portuguese popular guitars. The voice enters at the fifth bar using a soft, delicate register. The simplicity of the melodic line and harmonic structure drives us away from the hardness of some words:

Geme o restolho, triste e solitário / A embalar a
noite escura e fria (...)

The haulm wails, sad and lonely / Lulling the cold
and dark night (...)

Geme o restolho, preso de saudade / Esquecido,
enlouquecido, dominado / Escondido entre as
sombras do montado / Sem forças e sem cor e sem
vontade

The haulm wails, locked in longing / Forgotten,
demented, dominated / Hidden in the shadows of
the hayloft / Without strength, color or will

Geme o restolho, a transpirar de chuva / Nos
campos que a ceifeira mutilou / Dormindo em
velhos sonhos que sonhou / Na alma a mágoa
enorme, intensa, aguda

The haulm wails, perspiring rain / In the fields the
reaper mutilated / Sleeping in old dreams he
dreamed of / In its soul an intense, cutting grief

Refrain:

Refrain:

Mas é preciso morrer e nascer de novo / Semear no
pó e voltar a colher / Há que ser trigo, depois ser
restolho / Há que penar para aprender a viver (...)

But you need to die and be reborn / Seed the dust
and reap again / You need to be wheat, than haulm
/ You need to suffer to learn how to live (...)

In this song, Mafalda Veiga “paints” an image⁴³ highlighting natural elements (night, rain, dust, shadows) while impersonating the haulm, as a way to describe life’s challenges and setbacks.

I will close my discussion of Mafalda Veiga’s first album with “Planície”, track one, the best-known song in her repertoire. It can be defined as a “signature tune”, where song and performer are inseparable. As David Marshall reminds us (2006:199) “A song, in essence, becomes a sign of the performer”. Thirty years after its initial publication, several generations know this song, especially the refrain.

The poem draws on beautiful images of a landscape inhabited by a flock of birds from the south. They are leaving, “at the end of their exile”⁴⁴. Although the birds are the main characters in the lyrics, as they reflect the end and beginning of seasons and are a metaphor for departure and return - bringing “melodies / to sing to the girls / in pilgrimage [romaria] nights”⁴⁵ -, the landscape description seems to be the most important element in the poem. Again, like in “Restolho”, natural elements are described, allowing the listener to visualize strong images.

⁴³ Mafalda Veiga has a close relation with the visual arts and studied painting in Spain and in Lisbon.

⁴⁴ “no fim do seu degredo”

⁴⁵ “trazem melodias / p’ra cantar às moças / em noites de romaria”

O bando debandou
Subindo do arvoredó
Do vácuo que ficou
No fim do seu degedro
As asas abrem chagas
No acinazar do entardecer
E amansam a agonia
Do dia a escurecer (...)

The flock departed
Rising from the grove
The vacuum remained
At the end of their exile
The wings open wounds
At the grey sunset
And tame the agony
Of the day darkening (...)

We may also infer that the singer-songwriter is witnessing these events (“At dawn my sorrow sways”⁴⁶) and that the flock of migrating birds is directly related to Mafalda Veiga’s life experiences.

Musically, the most distinctive characteristic in this song is the instrumental crescendo. The song was arranged by Manuel Faria. It begins with four long notes, entering progressively, sustained in the DX7 synthesizer. This immediately creates a feeling of “suspended” time and provides a “static” background that emphasizes the listeners’ expectations for the voice. After this introduction, the first pair of verses is sung freely, with no time constrictions, accompanied harmonically by the synthesizer. In the second couple of verses, small melodic ornaments are added by the twelve-string guitar, establishing a musical “dialogue” with the voice (recalling *fado*’s guitar accompaniment). The first chorus is still sung “freely” over this sound “tapestry” until a small bridge leads the listeners to the third pair of verses, where guitar and bass accentuate the beat harmonically and rhythmically, followed by piano chords (in the sixth verse). The drums enter at the end of this verse and all the instruments play the refrain and its repetition. The song ends with a saxophone solo, accompanied by the rhythmic section, in a crescendo-decrescendo curve, until the song fades out.

The beauty and “simplicity” of the melodic line, the strength of the words and the “expectations” provoked by the arrangement (that keeps surprising the listener with new musical elements) may explain the commercial success of this song. Everybody seemed to like it at the time, given the number of albums sold and the amount of times it was played on the radio (according to Manuel Faria: “a lot” and “everywhere”). However, the singer-songwriter stopped singing it and, in her response to questions posed by journalists in two interviews, she expresses her mixed feeling towards this song :

Alexandra Simões de Abreu⁴⁷ - “There’s a song that chased you for years, “Pássaros do Sul”⁴⁸. Do you still sing it?

⁴⁶ “No adejo da alvorada / Oscila a minha mágoa”

Mafalda Veiga - Not for the last fifteen years. I got sick of it. I think music has to give immense pleasure, otherwise it doesn't make any sense. That song was so attacked and used to attack me that I honestly don't know how to grab it. And I have another sixty songs, so I don't really need to sing it."

Davide Pinheiro⁴⁹ - "*Pássaros do Sul*, namely the song "Planície", was a burden or a privilege?

Mafalda Veiga - It depends. It was a privilege to have a silver disc after one month. The next year I gave a lot of concerts, everything was very fast, I would have preferred to have a slower learning process. On the other hand, when people only know one song and they don't like it, it is complicated, but it happens with any person who has a lot of success in the beginning of a career (...). I hadn't played "Planície" for a long time but I do understand that, when you only know a small portion of someone's work, that is still the reference."

From the singer-songwriter perspective, it is easy to understand that she wanted to move forward, and that singing the same song for thirty years can be an arduous challenge. Nevertheless, I kept asking myself why an iconic song like "Planície" inspires such mixed feelings, not just for the author but - as I came to realize -, also for some listeners?

The listeners I talked to, informally, also expressed mixed feelings about the song: it was a "good" tune but, through the years, something happened. Some affirmed they got tired of it, others said that the voice is "shrill", "annoying" and, most of them, were inclined to think that the mocking sketch made by the comedian Herman José changed their perception of the song and its author. The description of a "shrill" voice and this sketch seem to be related, as I will try to demonstrate below. I asked some friends to sing "Planície" from memory. Few of them recalled the beginning of the song and jumped into the refrain; the majority sang it in a very high pitch, with a "shrill" voice. That was also my memory of the singer-songwriter's performance and when I listened to it again, I realized that the differences between the interpretation and the memory of it were very different: the singer's voice was not that "high" and not that "shrill". Actually, the melody moves within a low range. My perception of a high pitch, I suppose, was intensified by Veiga's use of the throat/chest register, with a nasal timbre;

⁴⁷ "Mafalda Veiga - Sou obcecada com as palavras" ["I'm obsessed with words"], Alexandra Simões de Abreu in *Revista Única*, *Semanário Expresso*, 24.12.2009.

⁴⁸ The journalist referred to the song "*Pássaros do Sul*" but she really meant the song "Planície". ["Lowland"]. This song was popularized and is often referred to by the words of the refrain: "Pássaros do Sul". According to Manuel Faria, the title of the song was exactly that, but was changed so that the album would not have the same title.

⁴⁹ "Mafalda Veiga: Preservo e valorizo a relação autêntica com a música" ["Mafalda Veiga: I preserve and value an authentic relation with music"], Davide Pinheiro in *Semanário Sol*, 28-02-2017.

because of this, the higher notes are more exposed. This high pitch feeling may also be intensified by the “coloring” of the vowels with small unmeasured vibratos that recall a trembling voice, especially in the middle and end of words. Ornaments (*mordents*) similar to those used in *cante alentejano* and *fado* are used by the voice⁵⁰. These stylistic characteristics index folk music and women’s popular voices crystallized by the Portuguese process of *folklorization*⁵¹. Perhaps this also explains the success of the song since, as I explained previously, in the mid eighties Portuguese popular music was living a renewed interest in popular culture and expressive practices associated with the “folk” and rurality (Rui Cidra in Castelo-Branco 2010: 1046-9).

“Planície” - The mocking sketch

In 1996⁵², the comedian Herman José made a humoristic sketch singing the refrain of “Planície”. I realized that several of my interlocutors associate the song with the sketch or, more accurately, the sketch with the song. The majority of the people with whom I conversed remembered the sketch vividly, and sung the song mimicking not Mafalda Veiga but Herman José’s performance. The sketch seems to have had a disproportionate impact on public reception and perception of Veiga’s performance and iconic song. As referred by Manuel Faria:

“That sketch “had an unmeasured impact on people (...). At the time [when the song was published] nobody thought that [Veiga’s voice] was shrill or annoying. People started thinking that when Herman sung it in a squeak way” (Personal Interview 22-05-2017).

⁵⁰ Mafalda Veiga started singing *fado* in family gatherings accompanied by her uncle, Pedro da Veiga, who was a *fado* player and her guitar teacher. Although she did not feel comfortable in this genre’s vocal style, *fado* was an important influence in her first songs and initial vocal posture and ornamentation. In her last album “Praia” [“Beach”] (2016), Mafalda wrote a song called “Fado”, where she slightly recovers the singing style, especially in vocal ornamentation, present in some of her first songs. This song is based in key words associated with the genre (*saudade*, “destiny”, “river”) and maritime images.

⁵¹ As other European countries, Portugal underwent a process of folklorization, institutionalized by the dictatorial regime of Salazar, since the mid 1930s. According to Castelo-Branco and Branco, folklorization is “the process of construction and institutionalization of performative practices, considered ‘traditional’, constituted by fragments taken from the popular (folk) culture, normally, rural” (2003: 1). This “rurality” is legitimized by the state, that promoted political and aesthetic regulation of folklore (*idem*: 8), with the creation of institutional mechanisms like FNAT, SNI and Casas do Povo [Houses of the People], with the goal of defining and crystallizing authenticity and a “national identity” through music.

⁵² According to the information provided by RTP archives, the sketch was exhibited in the program “Herman Total” [“Total Herman”] in 12-06-1996.

Nowadays, the sketch would probably go unnoticed but at the time, with only one television channel available, Herman was the most popular and respected TV entertainer. He had great influence and legitimated - and continues to do so - the quality of Portuguese artists. According to Manuel Faria, the musical and social environment at the time was “confined” and “volatile” and he was peremptory when describing this event as “a shot in [Mafalda’s] head” (*idem*), with repercussions he could not imagine.

Herman José performed the song’s refrain in a high pitch with a trembling and shrill voice. Wearing a wig and dressing a black jersey and a white shirt with round, embroidered collars, he stands still - mimicking Mafalda’s immobility while performing - and each time he starts singing, birds defecate on him with more intensity through the sketch. Upset, and making irritated high sounds, he starts to cry and opens an umbrella, changing the song lyrics from “they bring melodies to sing to the girls” to “they bring melodies to shit on the girls”.

Herman was able to take all the author’s characteristics and expose them, not as advantages, but as peculiar traces for mockery: her inexperience and shyness when performing; her young age; her high vocal range and ornamentation in this particular song. Through stereotypical gender marks, he made sexist deductions on Veiga’s personality: the loss of control, bursting in the childish cry; the extreme irritation when confronted with adversity; gestures and poses between two opposite situations - maintaining a “fake” posture while performing publicly and being terribly upset with the “birds”. Herman’s clothes and wig do not imitate Mafalda Veiga, but are constructed to stress two characteristics: rurality and sexuality. Herman’s hair accentuates an “old fashion” hairstyle and the black and white clothes, buttoned to the neck, imply an asexual figure (like a nun). This is in no way similar to Mafalda’s look at the time, but it relates to her family’s origins - in backward, religious, rural Portugal - and her education in Spain in a catholic private school. The sketch ridicules not only the singer-songwriter but women in general, mocking stereotypical characteristics of the “feminine”.



Figure 2 - Frame of Herman's José Mocking sketch (1996) and the albums covers for "Cantar" ["Sing"] (1988) and "A Cor da Fogueira" (1996) ["The color of the Bonfire"].

In sum, by exaggerating the performative and vocal characteristics of the singer-songwriter, reinforcing her shyness and dramatizing an uncontrolled and childish cry, he made the singer-songwriter a topic of conversation and mockery among the public in the following months, maybe years.

If gender favored Mafalda Veiga's entrance in the music industry, because the Portuguese market didn't have a woman singer-songwriter, this sketch and its obvious sexism opened the possibility for critics⁵³ and musical agents to neglect and criticize her music. I gained a better understanding of the impact of Herman's satirical sketch when I questioned composer and pianist Filipe Raposo⁵⁴ if people still request Veiga to perform "Planície" in concerts; his answer illustrates my point:

"They do, they do... they ask innocently or mockingly. There are those two requests. Mockingly when we play in the open air where people attend concerts not because they are fans [in Festivals for instance], and [others] ask [for the song] because they are fans. It is fucked up..." (Filipe Raposo, personal interview 13-04-2017).

After I sent a first draft of this chapter to Mafalda Veiga, she felt I was giving too much importance to this sketch and she didn't have the same perception as Filipe Raposo, regarding people's requests for "Planície". So I cross checked with Ana Moitinho (her manager for the last seventeen years) and Joana Rocha, a fan who now works with Moitinho, at her agency "Radar dos Sons". Ana affirmed that "not so many people ask for Planície, only people who don't know Mafalda's work at all and these people don't go to concerts." Joana reinforced this idea: "eventually, that could happen amongst some older people, outside Lisbon, in the north or in the interior; what people really ask

⁵³ Manuel Faria and Mafalda Veiga referred this to me, but they didn't specify any particular events or critics: "I never understood why the resistance towards me made the sketch so aggressive, or why it was used against me in such an aggressive way" (Mafalda Veiga, personal interview 2017).

⁵⁴ Filipe Raposo has been accompanying Mafalda Veiga since the album *Chão* ["Ground"] (2008).

for is “Restolho” (...) Planície I do not remember” (Ana Moitinho e Joana Rocha, personal interview, 05-07-2017).

It was not my intention to measure “Planice” popularity as reflected in audience requests for the song. It seems to me, based on my experience as a member of the audience, that the performance context plays an important role in drawing specific audiences, and hence in the repertoire that they would like to hear. For example, I recently attended a free street concert in Espinho⁵⁵ where Mafalda Veiga was presenting her last album “Praia” (2016). Next to me, a group of middle-aged women asked loudly and throughout the concert: “Play the birds, play the birds!”. They were followed by other audience members making the same request. This continued until the end of the concert. I talked with two of these women and they were very upset: “I drove so many kilometers and she didn’t sing the birds!”. When I told them that the singer-songwriter was launching a new album and that she had stopped singing “Planície” for a long time, one of them replied “But that is the beautiful one”.

The point I want to stress is that an initial success, often seen as positive, can be a limiting factor in an artist’s career. S/he needs to be very resilient to continue working, despite being associated with a particular album or song. I talked with a lot of people who do not hear Veiga’s music nor do they attend her concerts. However, they know her name essentially because of one of her songs that either attracts or repels. As Ana Moitinho pointed out:

“There are many people, within a certain age range and from an elite, who are still attached to the song “Planície” and probably to the Herman sketch; they don’t even bother to try to understand what Mafalda has been doing for the last twenty-five years” (*idem*).

In short, “Pássaros do Sul” revealed an original, complex, socially engaged author, with the ability to create poetic and musical images drawing on strong visual inputs, associating them with feelings of loss, belonging, solitude and nostalgia. The singer-songwriter’s poems guide the listener through the construction of idealized images of rural, pastoral day-to-day life in Alentejo. The album also contains most of the elements - in a scattered, “raw” form - that the author develops in her future work. It is a heterogeneous album, given the multiplicity of issues it unfolds and the differences in

⁵⁵ In “Festival Oito”, 14-08-2017.

musical arrangements⁵⁶. Through her vocal register and ornamentation, the singer-songwriter evokes “traditional” vocal style, drawing on fado and alentejano singing.

The success of the album - especially of the songs “Planície” and “Restolho” -, may be partially justified by the poems’ content. These lyrics address exile: leaving and coming back; separation and return; death and resurrection. In a broader social and historical Portuguese context, this can be representative of the political turmoil in the country in the two decades prior to the publication of the album: the colonial war, the return of Portuguese people that lived in the colonies, exile motivated by the dictatorship, and emigration due to economic hardship.

After “Pássaros do Sul”

Mafalda Veiga recorded a new album immediately after “Pássaros do Sul” - “Cantar” [“Sing”], published in 1988 -, a complex and well accomplished work, written “on the road” during the tour of her first album. Poetry, music, arrangements, mixing and production were more complex, resulting in a consistent and stylistically contemporary album. “Cantar” starts with a somewhat “experimental” arrangement of “Por outras Palavras” [“In other words”]: rain and thunder, a sparse piano and Mafalda’s voice, in a more introspective singing register. Manuel Faria, producer and arranger, recalls the recording process:

“We did that song only with the sound of rain and piano, but a piano... that had a funny technique. I recorded a piano playing the music and then added a second piano following it; then I took the first. I wanted the accompaniment to be sparse, with a few notes here and there; we thought that was the essence of music, and it was (...) I think

⁵⁶ Some arrangements were made by the bass player António Ferro, others by the producer Manuel Faria. Although the producer considers the work a “consistent album” because the songs were “extremely well written”, he made interesting remarks about the arrangements and the musicians involved in the recording process: “Mafalda didn’t have any experience and showed up with musicians that were suggested by other musicians. It was a kind of soccer team where I was the coach, and I could not dismiss the entire team. So everything was extremely negotiated and reconciled: there were things I didn’t like and I let them pass, things that Mafalda didn’t enjoy so much but, because the musicians who played in the maquetes [the recorded proposal of the album] liked it... it’s an uneven album, with great things and others “lighter” (...) now I wouldn’t probably do that (...) in the following album, all musicians were already chosen by me” (Manuel Faria, personal interview, 22-05-2017).

she [Mafalda Veiga] was ahead of her time, the work was pioneering. Nowadays it's still a modern work" (Personal interview, 22-05-2017).

The album was a commercial failure and passed unnoticed. According to the producer, some of the reasons have to do with its experimental style, and the fact that the album's publisher, EMI-VC, did not promote the album, since the label's attention was focused on a "new" singer-songwriter, Pilar Homem de Melo⁵⁷.

For the singer-songwriter, this commercial failure happened because people had "high expectations", given the success of "Pássaros do Sul", and were probably expecting a "more pop album". She also referred that these expectations were mixed with "feelings of uncertainty" regarding her quality as a singer-songwriter: "when a person is very successful people get suspicious"⁵⁸ (Mafalda Veiga, personal interview, 5-06-2017).

After these events Mafalda Veiga felt she needed a break. She moved to Spain again to take painting classes in an atelier where she had previously been, in order to "find herself"; she was not prepared for "unfounded, unfair, destructive criticism"⁵⁹ and "public exposition" (Mafalda Veiga, personal interview, 5-06-2017). In 1992, she recorded a new album "Nada se repete" ["Nothing repeats itself"]. This is an extremely complex and emotionally intense⁶⁰ work: elaborate melodies, intricate harmonies, "deep" and harsh poems and bold arrangements; "emotionally" very distinctive from the smoothness and "delicacy" of "Cantar". The album was another commercial failure but Veiga found the strength to keep working, after "many people said she [her career] was finished" (Manuel Faria, personal interview, 22-05-2017).

In 1996, the singer-songwriter recorded a new album, "A Cor da Fogueira" ["The color of the Bonfire"] with a new producer, José Sarmiento, published by the label Strauss.

⁵⁷ "When the second disc came out, everything was arranged with 'Semanário7' so that Mafalda would be in the cover of its next number... and it was the editor [from EMI] who changed it to pose another artist, Pilar Homem de Melo, who was starting out and appeared to be their choice" (Manuel Faria, Personal Interview, 22-05-2017).

⁵⁸ In popular music, there seems to be a prejudice associated with musical success and "quality" which constitutes a strange paradox. At a global level, as Susan MacClary (1991: 154) suggests when referring to Madonna: "Her music deliberately aims at a wide popular audience rather than at those who pride themselves on their elite aesthetic discrimination. Her enormous commercial success is often held against her, as evidence that she plays for the lowest common denominator - that she prostitutes her art (and, by extension, herself)."

⁵⁹ The singer-songwriter referred to awkward situations in the process of promoting "Cantar"; for example, she was accused by a well known woman journalist of copying Garcia Lorca in the song "Llovizna".

⁶⁰ With the exception of the lyrics of "Passos" ["Steps"], the most common words throughout the album are "pain", "loss", "death", "silence" and "fear" (this last word being repeated fourteen times).

This album marks a new aesthetic orientation in Veiga's composition and vocal style and allowed her to access a younger and larger audience. Some songs became mainstream, like "O Lume" ["The fire"] and "Em toda a parte" ["Everywhere"]. The consolidation of a large group of fans and their massive attendance in concerts took place between "A Cor da Fogueira" and "Tatuagem" ["Tattoo"], published in 1999, where the songs "Tatuagem" – in a duet with the singer-songwriter Jorge Palma - and "Cada lugar teu" ["Every Place of Yours"] were and have been extremely successful.

From this point up to her last studio album, the singer-songwriter has been composing in a consistent style: most songs have a narrow vocal range (when compared with the first three albums); a clear and "catchy" melody that fits the words perfectly (due to the simultaneous writing of words and music); and an singable refrain. The harmonic tonal structure is often predictable - playing with major/minor relations -, but can also be surprising, through the use of unexpected modulations and the complexity of some of the arrangements.⁶¹ This consistency in style is enhanced by the collaboration with different musicians and the use of different instrumentation and sonorities in each album.

The most important change, following the album "Nada se repete" (1992), took place in Mafalda Veiga's voice. She progressively redefined her vocal style, moving from a chest/throat register and nasal timbre to a chest register. Long notes, that were normally used in the middle and final syllables, gave place to shorter sounds, sometimes in a "recited" / "conversional" style. Her vocal tension changed deeply, showing no signs of effort or fatigue. The singer-songwriter seems to have found ways to compose idiomatically for her own voice, which allows a comfortable vocal posture. These vocal changes can be easily observed when comparing songs from the second and third albums with their re-recordings in the album "Zoom"⁶², published in 2011.

Beyond these changes in vocal register and timbre, recording technology and a new approach in sound mixing certainly affected the listener's perception of Veiga's voice. In her first three albums, her voice had a lot of reverberation, which made it sound like it was on a distant plane, far from the listener. In her last songs, voice is the most important element, it is projected, allowing the listener to relate to it more closely.

⁶¹ Mafalda always worked with jazz musicians, and the acoustic piano became an important element in her musical arrangements, adding harmonic and melodic complexity to the songs.

⁶² "Zoom" (2011) is a collection of songs from previous albums with new arrangements.

Constructing Intimacy

A great deal of Mafalda Veiga's promotion is made by her fans, starting with her webpage, initially designed by a group of followers with the purpose of organizing meetings and mobilizing people to attend her concerts. If we type the singer-songwriter name on Youtube, hundreds of videos will pop up and most of them are not official. It is interesting to note that fans publish her songs making their own videos or power-point presentations, showing their individual interpretations of the songs' meanings. The most watched video of the singer songwriter - "Cada Lugar Teu" ["Every Place of Yours"] -, with almost three million visualizations, is a power point presentation with romantic pictures, uploaded probably by a fan (She Ribeiro, published in May 2008, last accessed 30-09-2017). We can find more than twenty videos of the same song, showing multiple scenes like couples in love, videos of a beach or even video games footage. Some have subtitles in Portuguese, Spanish, English and even Lithuanian. The "official" video (uploaded in September 2007 by Mafalda Veiga Official) is from a live performance, and has two hundred and fifty thousand visualizations (last accessed 30-09-2017). Also impressive is the number of covers for this song (I checked more than fifty): people of all ages singing in their rooms, *a capella* or with an instrument, in concerts, in karaoke's, in bands or choirs.

This obviously also happens with other artists, but in the Portuguese musical context it is not a common phenomenon. Although I never performed Mafalda Veiga's songs, most of my friends usually sang them in gatherings where a guitar was available, so she was also a part of my life through the (sometimes passionate) voice of others. I was waiting for a long time to see her in a live concert and, in January 2014, I had that opportunity when she performed in the large concert hall of the Centro Cultural de Belém. Unfortunately, like in many of her concerts, it was sold out. People drive from all over the country to take part in Mafalda Veiga's concerts. According to her manager: "All these sold out shows, Mafalda did not fill them carried on someone's lap!, neither by the media, nor the publishers; she gets to people through herself, and her songs (...). That is incredible! (Ana Moitinho, personal interview 05-07-2017).

It was only in the last year, after I began my research on Veiga's work, that I was able to attend one of her live concerts following the release of the album "Praia" (published in 18-11-2016). The event was poorly advertised; I found information about it in a very

small column in Lisbon's Cultural Agenda. The following excerpt of my field notes provides a glimpse into her capacity to maintain a faithful audience:

Arena Live - Lisbon Casino. Monday, 21 November 2016, 22 pm - free admission

I arrived very soon at the Casino, one hour before the concert. The stage is prepared and a few people start to arrive trying to find a good place to see. I stood in a place where I could observe everybody come in. Next to me was a group of four women (somewhere between the ages of twenty and thirty), talking loudly about the singers they enjoy and their favorite songs by Mafalda Veiga. One of them says: "I have not seen her in a long time...I thought she wasn't playing anymore...". They continued talking and it was clear they had not heard any of her new songs; they seemed surprised when they realized that the singer-songwriter was presenting a new album. The venue was filling up. A family including a young couple with two children and an older couple (the grandparents?) occupied the space next to me. They looked a bit stressed although the children were very excited. I asked them where they had come from. The older man answered: "From Santarém" [a city in central Portugal]. I remarked that it was a bit far and asked if they were staying in Lisbon overnight. "No, we need to go back because the kids have school tomorrow". They had come purposely to see the concert after a day's work, because it was Mafalda. "She's part of the family, we all like her. Because it is a free concert we decided to come, buy some things and have dinner together at the shopping." More families arrived with small children, lots of adolescents in small groups, young and old couples, groups of women; the audience was immensely diversified in age. Finally the concert started with four songs from the new album. Everybody was quiet applauding parsimoniously at the end of the songs, until Veiga sang "Abraça-me bem"⁶³ ["Hold me tight"] and all the audience started singing along.

It was interesting to see the wide range of age groups among her attendance. Some listeners have followed her career since its beginning and influenced their children to like the singer-songwriter's music; others know the most recent songs from the radio or from the Portuguese and Brazilian *telenovelas* (soap operas) in which some of her songs are heard. Most of the listeners I talked to mentioned that they follow Mafalda Veiga's work and are especially attracted by the content of her poems.

⁶³ From the album "Chão" (2008).

But how does the singer-songwriter nourish the relationship with her audience? By what means does she connect to such an eclectic audience and at the same keep attracting new listeners? And how is it possible to maintain fan “loyalty” for several decades, especially in a time where everything is quickly consumed and ephemeral?

In concerts and interviews, Mafalda Veiga frequently expresses her gratitude to fans. She even dedicated the song “Cúmplices” [“Accomplices”] from the album “Na alma e na pele” [“In soul and skin”] (2007), to her fans club, writing in the album the following acknowledgment:

“To my fan club, because being accomplices is one of the biggest treasures in my life! Thanks for sharing the certainty that we will always be “together, always, anywhere” (this sentence belongs to Margarida!) and by the effort and enthusiasm with the website and with the tour promotion (*in* Cd booklet “Na alma e na pele”, 2003).”

The same booklet also contains chords and tablatures added to the lyrics, a clear invitation for listeners and fans to play them. Being a very reserved person, the singer-songwriter uses several artifacts to relate to her fans and listeners. In addition to the tablatures, her latest album “Praia,” available in a special edition, includes: a “studio diary” containing pictures of the singer-songwriter composing and recording, handwritten lyrics and musical notes, childhood and other pictures taken in her home and in her work place. This album also integrates three “extra” songs, immediately recorded following the compositional process, only using guitar and voice, to transmit an “intimate” vocal and instrumental register.

Intimacy and “authenticity” - through the communication of heartfelt, inner feelings and life events, sober performance and looks, empathy towards audiences - are the most distinguishable traces in Mafalda Veiga’s career. She connects and relates with her audience through what David Marshall calls “commitment” and “difference”:

“Commitment in this context refers to the audience's close and intimate relationship to the pop star as well as the way in which the artist conveys his or her authenticity in representing the audience. In some cases, authenticity is displayed through emotional sincerity: the performer's direct and personal address in the song is further

individualized through the private forms of reception. This kind of personal relationship between performer and audience describes the more classical construction of the popular music star to emerge in the twentieth century. In other cases, authenticity is expressed through the performer's communication of solidarity with an audience. The focus in these instances is on the creation and maintenance of codes of difference and particularity by both audience and performer” (Marshall 2006: 205-6).

Mafalda Veiga’s songs communicate “emotional sincerity” to a particular listener within the “abstract” and collective audience. This happens because her writing omits all personal references to gender, time and characters in a story: it is about everyone and nobody at the same time. She also exposes fragilities and strengths common to most human beings, through what appears to be a biographical narrative, often written in the first person. This sharing of strong experiences and inner feelings, with a large crowd, produces an idea of “authenticity”⁶⁴, and enhances a relation of intimacy between the listeners and the singer-songwriter. For many of her fans, her music accompanied different stages in their lives and, consequently, *she* (not just her music) was “there”. The singer-songwriter values and sustains this “familiar” relation:

“I like playing in closed theaters because of the intimacy you can establish with people, like if you were in a familiar place (...) and you can create an extraordinary intimacy with the audience being yourself, in the most honest and authentic way. That is the work I have done with myself [as performer] and with my way of making music” (Mafalda Veiga personal interview 18-05-2016).

To Veiga, her “life and music are the same” and inseparable. Her writing is motivated by a strong need to communicate and, I imagine, she understands communication as a “socially interactive and intersubjective process of reality construction through message production and interpretation (Feld1984: 2)⁶⁵”. She challenges herself to express

⁶⁴ According to Marshall, the popular music performer is the key element for relating to musical “authenticity”: “how he or she expresses the emotionality of the music and his or her own inner emotions, feelings, and personality and how faithful the performer is to the intentions of the musical score are all part of how the individual performer is determined to be authentic” (Marshall 2006:196).

⁶⁵ This resonates with Steven Feld’s perspective “that music has a fundamentally social life”: “Communication is not the ‘thing’ or ‘entity’ from which people ‘take’ meanings; rather, social engagement in the process, through interpretation of symbolic forms, makes it possible to imagine ongoing meaningful activity as subjectively experienced by social actors. In other words, we cannot speak of meaning without speaking of interpretation (whether public or conscious). By communication then, I mean a socially interactive and intersubjective process of reality construction through message production and interpretation” (Feld 1984: 2).

personal thoughts, feelings and emotions in ways that allow people to subjectively interpret and create meaningful relations with her words. As a fan pointed out:

“Mafalda’s songs started to make sense to me in the end of the nineties. Somehow I would listen and identify with it; that is what I like about her, what she writes relates to multiple stages in our life. I have the feeling that I could be a great friend of hers” (Silvia Ropio (fan), personal interview, 19-06-2017).

This intimacy is also reinforced in her performance. The singer-songwriter presents herself informally dressed, standing still while singing, eyes wide open looking at the audience, no facial or body gestures that could be read as staged or “fake”. As eloquently stated by Ana Moitinho (manager), and Joana Rocha (Veiga’s fan and presently her road manager):

Ana - “As a person and artist Mafalda is the same, she doesn’t wear a mask, a character. There are people who like that, others that don’t (...). When on stage something is wrong, she is unable to cover it up.”

Joana - “Yes, but at the same time, some moments are absolutely incredible and unforgettable; suddenly there is an emotion, something that happens only in that precise instant; it is not artificial or fake, it is pure, and the way people respond to it, in each show, overwhelms me” (Ana Moitinho e Joana Rocha, personal interview 05-07-2017).

This “honest/true” way of performing is difficult to maintain, and Mafalda Veiga has been doing it since the beginning of her career, even when she felt susceptible to criticism and to an unfair devaluation of her work. As an author and performer, Mafalda Veiga provided a model and opened the possibility for other women singer-songwriter and musicians to follow suit.

Chapter III

The art of veiling: Rita Redshoes

Before I started my research I had only heard a few songs by Rita Redshoes on the radio. Her music and voice were somehow indifferent to me, and I never took the necessary time to attentively listen to her songs and understand their meanings. I kept asking myself why I had never been curious about Rita Redshoes's music: was it due to the music itself, her voice, or the English lyrics? Or, was my lack of interest based on an unconscious preconceived idea about her artistic name and image? I couldn't say, but this initial indifference towards this singer-songwriter's work became central in the development of the following analysis.

After I heard "Lights and Darks", her second album published in 2010, it became clear to me that the singer-songwriter wrote ambiguously, playing with a multiplicity of characters and their stories, emotions and feelings within the same narrative. Also, beyond this ambiguity, I noted the irony in the song "Bad Lila" - that I will analyze in detail below - and the subtlety used in the construction of a narrative within the album, built through thematic and musical connections between songs. My decision to include Rita Redshoes's in this research was influenced by these elements and also highly motivated by a small video, uploaded on Youtube by Rita Redshoes's production company. The video was the first episode (of seven "Webisodes") about the recording process of her latest album "Her", published in 2016. The words of the producer, Victor Van Vugt, confused me:

"The songs are much, much deeper than we first think and the more you go into it, the more you realize what it is about. The same with Rita as an artist: she is really a great artist and I don't know if people really know that about her."

Victor Van Vugt, producer of "Her" [cd, 2016] in Rita Redshoes - Her - Webisode 1, 25-10-2016.

In "Webisode 7" he continues his thoughts:

"Rita has things to say and says it in a very poetic way, very poetic. She is quite subtle. I hope that people understand the strength of what she says because it can be quite subtle, but it's really strong."

Victor Van Vugt, producer of "Her" [cd, 2016] in Rita Redshoes - Her - Webisode 7, 14-11-2016.

In a way, these statements partially explained my initial feelings of “indifference” towards Redshoes’s music: her poetic subtlety needed to be “studied” in order to be understood. But they also reveal a paradox: the singer-songwriter is “subtle” and her songs are “much deeper” than they seem at first hearing; at the same time Rita Redshoes is also a “great artist”. So, shouldn’t we conclude that she deliberately uses that “subtlety ” to hide the “deeper meanings”, the “strength” of what she wants to say? And, if she does that, why does Van Vugt reveal it? If Redshoes wanted people to realize her “strong” messages/meanings wouldn’t she write her songs in a more “obvious” way?

I tried to interpret Van Vugt’s statements from two different perspectives, although they both relate to gender. On the one hand, Vugt’s comments may be a way of legitimizing, even empowering Rita Redshoes’s public perception as a “great artist”, as an original author, in an industry that he knows well how women’s work is still regarded with distrust. On the other hand, I can’t avoid seeing it as a sexist comment: Can’t the singer-songwriter speak for herself and for her work? Does she need his “protection”? And by affirming Redshoes’s subtlety, and people’s lack of awareness of her strength, isn’t he implicitly saying her work is “superficial”? And how does Rita Redshoes react to this? Does she deliberately “veil” the meanings of her songs? And, if she does, by what means?

I obviously do not wish to answer for neither of them, but I will try to understand my initial disinterest in Redshoes’s work - and the questions that came with it - by analyzing some of the singer-songwriter’s recorded performances and videos and relating them with her own discourse about her life and work experiences. I will start by her artistic name.

The “frightened girl” with a “superwoman cover”: Rita Redshoes’s iconic image

Rita Redshoes visual icon is a red high heel shoe (the color of the shoe often changes in some albums and in production materials). This is not a “neutral” object, as it encompasses two societal perspectives: on the one hand, women’s submission to painful and stereotypical beauty “norms”; on the other, the right to choose what to wear, associated with women’s emancipation movements. About her icon, Rita Redshoes said the following in an interview⁶⁶ published after the publication of her first album “Golden Era” (2008):

“[Red shoes] have to do with the Wizard of Oz’s imaginary, with something naïve and dream-like and with the feminine side of the red shoes, sexy, a bit rock’n’roll. There is a song by Bob Dylan that addresses precisely that, speaking of a character that acts like a woman and, simultaneously, cries like a little girl⁶⁷. I have all of that inside me, jumping from woman to girl. I am interested in exploring these different imagery universes.”

When I interviewed Rita Redshoes, she referred to the red shoe as intrinsically linked to children’s stories (not specifically to the Wizard of Oz), stressing their use as amulets, sometimes as perverse decoys to get power. She extrapolated this idea into her real life and performative experiences:

“There [on stage] I have powers. I don’t have that in my life. I’m the frightened girl, scared with the world. With my red shoes I can do something, I can control something. That’s my superwoman cover (...). The red shoe is not a thing of a shy woman! Step in and smash it!” (Personal interview, 13-10-2016).

After our interview, it became clear to me that the red high-heel serves a double function in Redshoes’s concerts and public appearances, simultaneously acting as a powerful talisman and as an affirmation of women’s emancipation. In both cases, this object embodies and symbolizes the empowerment she needs on stage, giving the

⁶⁶ “A fabulosa determinação de Rita Redshoes” [“The fabulous determination of Rita Redshoes”], Luís Ricardo Duarte, in *Aula Magna* magazine (October 2009).

⁶⁷ Rita is obviously referring to the song “Just like a woman”, in Dylan’s album “Blonde on Blonde” (1966): “She takes just like a woman, yes / She makes love just like a woman, yes, she does / And she aches just like a woman / But she breaks just like a little girl”.

singer-songwriter a sense of performative control. Nevertheless, she also admitted that this “self-made universe” may have a superficial reading:

“I should have chosen another name, but none of my family names worked (...). In Portugal not so much, but abroad this idea [the Redshoe] may be taken to a lighter, playful place that doesn’t correspond to my music (...). To me it represents power, but for people who don’t know me, it is hard to read it that way” (Personal interview, 13-10-2016).

I cannot measure the impact of the singer-songwriter’s name and iconic image. Nevertheless, giving the multiple and subjective interpretations this object allows, it may influence listeners’ reception of the singer-songwriter’s performances and music. I have to admit that my preconception of red high heels as a gender stereotype, partially motivated my “indifference” towards Rita Redshoes’s work.

The “childish voice”

After listening to all the albums published by Rita Redshoes, I recognized general characteristics regarding her voice. The singer-songwriter’s voice is perfectly in tune, well placed and she sings effortlessly. Her vocal posture is studied and she mainly uses a head register (the head register is mostly used in lyrical singing, and the singer-songwriter confirmed she attended lyrical singing classes). Her diction is precise and reinforces the “cleanness” of her vocal interpretation, as she sings each sound to its end, with special attention to the finishing consonants and their percussive characteristics. This is certainly intensified by the exclusive use of the English language in her lyrics⁶⁸. The vowels are short, and she rarely uses ornamentation, vibrato or rubato. There are no significant timbre changes in her performances and we don’t hear the sound of her breath or any kind of vocal “roughness” in most songs. In our interview, I asked the singer-songwriter if she was able to describe and relate aspects of her personality and/or life events with her voice. The answer was unexpected:

“I think my voice is very childlike (...) sometimes my voice is strange to me because it is much clearer than I feel myself as a person [laughs]. I really wanted to have a darker voice; but I’m thirty-five so I don’t think my voice will get to the place I want it to be.

⁶⁸ Exception made in “Her”, 2016, where she recorded three songs in Portuguese.

Perhaps that implies another type of life: a lot of drinking, a lot of smoking, no sleep [laughs]. (...) I don't think I'm a good singer and, although I studied singing for a long time, I don't see myself as a singer but as a composer. Therefore, I have a love - hate relation with this singing thing [laughs]" (personal interview, 13-10-2016).

Rita Redshoes's "idea" of her own voice is similar to the adjectives used by the listeners I interviewed informally. They described her voice in two well known songs we heard together as follows: "I'm the captain of my soul" (from the album "Lights and Darks", 2010), and "White lies" (from the album "Life is a Second of Love", 2014). Rita Redshoe's voice was described as: "clean", "teen", "flat", "common", "soulless" and less, but interestingly: "secure" and "safe". From these references to her voice, I may hypothesize that what I interpret as a "studied" voice is read by the singer-songwriter herself and by some listeners as a "childish", "teen", "clean" and "soulless" voice. Also interesting is the way listeners related a "clean" voice, or its lack of "roughness", with a "soulless", "common", even "safe" vocal quality. From my perspective, Rita Redshoes's voice indexes these qualities because it is flawless, almost perfect in terms of its musical/linguistic execution. The ambiguous "love-hate" relation between the singer-songwriter and her voice, together with the fact that she doesn't "see [herself] as a singer", probably justifies why she works so hard to deliver an immaculate, flawless vocal interpretation. In our conversation, Redshoes described her pursuit of vocal perfection as "obsessive":

"(...) in my first and second albums, I recorded the voice alone at home because I wanted to control it (...). In the first album, I made something like twenty-five takes of the same song until I found what I wanted. It was an obsessive thing, completely! And I knew I had to change that⁶⁹" (personal interview, 13-10-2016).

This idea of a "flawless" voice and the use of adjectives such as "childish", "clean" or "flat", inevitably evoke Roland Barthes historical essay "The grain of the voice" (1977). Almost all literature concerning the singing voice quotes Barthes, sometimes in dubious ways, given the multiplicity of interpretations that emerge from his text. As stated by Jonathan Dunsby (2009: 113 *in* Jarman-Ivens, 2011: 5): "Barthes's idea of 'the grain of

⁶⁹ In her second album ("Lights and Darks," the singer-songwriter changed her approach by recording two tracks "live" in the studio, together with the guitar player, with no cuts or editing. It was the beginning of a change that culminated with a very different vocal approach in the last album "Her" (2016).

the voice' has been mythologized. It is an idea that many people apparently feel they can understand instinctively, regardless of its original meaning. It seems to make intuitive sense.” To avoid falling in the same “intuitive” descriptions, I chose to quote Freya Jarman-Ivens in what I consider to be a coherent interpretation of Barthes text:

“Barthes’s notion of the grain emerges from an earlier set of concepts (...), namely a distinction between what he calls ‘geno-song’ and ‘pheno-song’, borrowing the prefixes from Julia Kristeva’s distinctions between ‘geno-text’ and ‘pheno-text’. Pheno-song refers to ‘everything in the performance which is in the service of communication’, those vocal functions that are culturally coded and assimilated: ‘the structure of the language being sung, the rules of the genre, [. . .] the composer’s idiolect, the style of the interpretation: [. . .] everything which it is customary to talk about’ (Barthes 1977, 182). Geno-song, in contrast, refers to aspects of singing located outside of this. It is not concerned with direct communication and representation, functioning instead as a playful signifier with no culturally recognized signified. The grain of the voice is found within the geno-song, and is identified by Barthes as specifically the perceptibility of the body’s presence in the singing voice: ‘The ‘grain’ is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs’ (*idem*: 188). It can be thought of, then, as those aspects of the voice where the physiology of vocal production is audible; in concrete terms, although Barthes himself is unclear about the specifics of what this means, we might identify the grain in, for instance, the air in a whisper, or the movement of the lips, tongue, and teeth against each other as the language is given sound” (Jarman-Ivens 2011: 5).

For the purpose of understanding why Redshoes’s voice is described - even by herself - with the adjectives I presented above, the idea of “grain” is extremely important. As I mentioned earlier, when listening to most of Rita Redshoes’s recorded songs, we hear a perfect diction, consonants being brought out, emphasized, a perfect tuning, a “flawless” voice. According to Barthes’s definition, the “pheno-song” - the “culturally coded and assimilated” vocal functions -, are perfectly revealed. However, the sounds of the singer-songwriter’s body, in its physicality (breathing, throat, muscles, tongue, mucous membranes, nose), are inaudible. Once significations emerge from the “grain”, and the grain emerges from the perception of the body in the voice, one could say that Redshoes’s voice lacks “grain”⁷⁰. This “lack” of “grain” may explain why her voice is described as “soulless” and “childish” since the presence of the body’s physicality in the

⁷⁰ Rita Redshoes’s “grain” varies, from song to song, and dramatically from studio to live performances; I observe this having into account an overview of her recorded work, especially her second and third albums.

singing voice transmits emotions and feelings. Rita Redshoes need to “control” her voice and its “perfection” may index emotional superficiality, resulting in the “childish”, “soulless” metaphors. As Simon Frith demonstrates:

“Certain physical experiences, particularly extreme feelings, are given vocal sounds beyond our conscious control - the sounds of pain, lust, ecstasy, fear, what one might call inarticulate articulacy: the sounds, for example, of tears and laughter; the sounds made by soul singers around and between their notes, vocal noises that seem expressive of their deepest feelings because we hear them as if they've escaped from a body that the mind - language - can no longer control” (Frith 1996: 192).

Rita Redshoes never “loses” control over her vocal interpretation: her vocal register and characteristics are within the techniques and aesthetics of a “lyrical”⁷¹ style more than in a “pop” style. That can be “confusing” because, as Frith puts it: “we hear singers [pop singers] as personally expressive (...) in a way that a classical singer, even a dramatic and “tragic” star like Maria Callas, is not” (*idem*: 186).

I am not affirming that the singer-songwriter doesn’t express emotions when singing. The question here is the subtlety with which she does, and that is also one of the reasons why I think her producer is concerned that listeners cannot understand the “depth” in Redshoes’s songs. I propose that there is no “ungrained” voice. However, the level of perception of the body singing is of extreme importance in the way a voice semiotically communicates emotions through music, even in wordless songs⁷². My point is that Rita Redshoes deliberately “cleans” her voice from its physicality in order to control the vocal result (as she mentioned in our conversation) and to somehow “hide” the dramatic charge, the emotions behind the songs, often autobiographical. By “separating” the voice from the body, displaying “vocal skill rather than an emotional state”⁷³ (Frith 1996: 213), reading emotions in Rita Redshoes’s songs can be quite challenging.

⁷¹ Reinforced by the recurrent use of “classical” instruments.

⁷² Barthes doesn’t consider “the grain” in wordless singing.

⁷³ This quote was taken from Simon Frith’s analysis to Dolly Parton’s performance. For Frith, Parton’s voice, as opposed to her body, “becomes the sign (...) the meaning around which all her other signs (the hair, the breasts, the gowns) are organized. The song of dependence (common in her repertoire and often self-written) is therefore so obviously crafted, so clearly designed to display vocal skill rather than an emotional state, that at the very least Parton’s audience has to consider her lyrical sentiments as ironic” (Frith 1996: 213).

Performing characters in music videos

Music videos change completely our perception of music, as they materialize images that become inseparable from a song or a musical piece. From the MTV phenomenon to the (almost) universal use of youtube, music videos are the most important resource to publicize the work of an artist and tends to be the most commonly used medium to experience music (Costa 2016). Frequently artists release their singles through music videos, which immediately generates an image or idea about the song's meaning.

I first heard Rita Redshoes's songs on albums, and was far from imagining the images that could go with the music; after seeing her videos I was, in most cases, surprised. In her video clips, the singer-songwriter constructs a set that implies a narrative, exploring multiple characters in a story, more or less related to the song itself: the girl playing with her band, in a barn ("The beginning song", from the album "Golden Era," 2008), the captain of a boat ("Captain of my soul", album "Lights and Darks," 2012), a woman on a journey searching for something, dressed in a stereotypical "cowboy style" (old backpack and boots, cowboy hat and a flannel shirt) and departing in a small rowing boat ("You should go" from the album "Lights and Darks"), or the perfect wife taking care of her cold, distant and apparently successful husband ("White Lies" from the album "Golden Era"):



Figure 3 - Images from Rita Redshoes music videos on Youtube.

About her music videos, in a 2009 interview⁷⁴, the singer-songwriter stated:

“I want to explore distinct imagery universes (...) these are elements that show how I compose and imagine my music through images. There’s not really a story but an environment, a set of references, colors and situations that are part of my musical universe.”

The video for the song “I’m the captain of my soul”, the opening track in “Lights and Darks” (2010), shows a stranded boat with Redshoes dressed as a captain, dancing and interacting with a black sailor. The song begins with the refrain, a repetition of the words “I’m the captain of my soul”, and the simple melodic and harmonic design catches the ear immediately. It is a playful song, easy to whistle, but it may also be read as a statement, a “self esteem” empowering “mantra”, since “I’m the captain of my soul” is the final sentence in William Henley’s iconic poem⁷⁵. At some point, Redshoes grabs a megaphone and says: “Oh captain oh my captain / I’m ‘gonna’ wade in the water / I’ll be washed by new tears / They’ll save me from my fears”, “screaming” it to the world, through a vocal amplifier that indexes manifestation, revolution. The video has three important characteristics that in context may pass unnoticed: firstly, and most obviously, the captain is a woman with red lipstick; secondly, the moment where Redshoes plays “iron arm” with the sailor and wins; finally, the megaphone episode I referred to above, a moment that reinforces the singer-songwriter’s “power” (or desire for power) over her “fate” and “soul”.

In the comments posted in youtube by fans and viewers (last accessed 10-01-2017), the only detail that assumes some relevance is the presence of the black dancer. One viewer started a discussion regarding the alleged homosexuality of the man who plays the sailor. That comment generated other comments about the dancer’s ethnicity:

⁷⁴ “A fabulosa determinação de Rita Redshoes” [“The fabulous determination of Rita Redshoes”], Luís Ricardo Duarte in *Aula Magna* magazine (October 2009).

⁷⁵ “I’m the captain of my soul” is the final sentence of the poem “Invictus” by William Ernest Henley (1849–1903). The poem inspired and is used in multiple artistic creations, including the film *Invictus* (2009), directed by Clint Eastwood, about Nelson Mandela and François Pienaar (the team captain of the South African rugby selection).

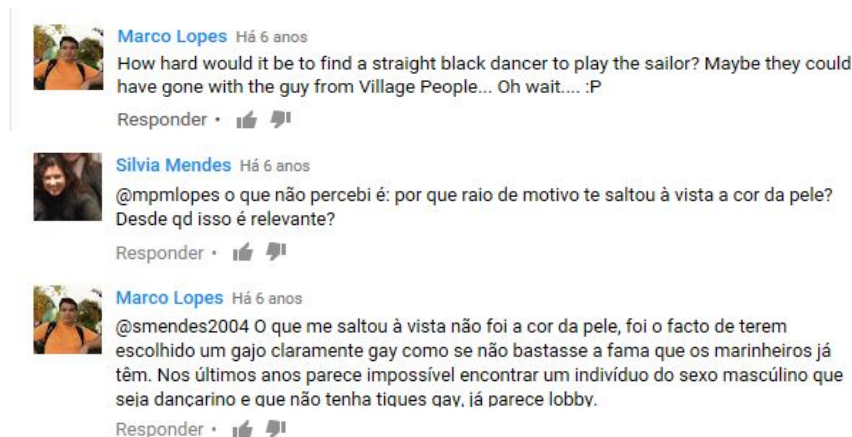


Figure 3.1 - Comments on youtube⁷⁶ for “I’m the captain of my soul” music video.

I can’t see indications or actions related to homosexual stereotypes in the video performance, so I am inclined to believe that the comment is related to the iron arm game I referred to previously, and the fact that the sailor loses it to a woman. What I consider to be the most important feature of the film - Rita Redshoes’s impersonation of the captain in control of her “boat”, a metaphor for destiny and fate -, is completely absent from the fifty-five comments on the video on youtube.

In a completely different aesthetic is the most watched Redshoes’s video on youtube, “Choose Love” (from the album “Golden Era”, 2008), with four hundred thousand visualizations (eight hundred thousand if we consider the two versions available, last accessed 30 - 08 - 2017). The singer-songwriter told me that this number of viewers is not related to the video itself, but to the song’s success and the fact that it was constantly playing on the radio. The video starts with Redshoes’s steady shadow, doing small hand movements. In the B section of the song, she finally appears in a white dress, a light veil covering her shoulders; this leads to a song bridge where the singer-songwriter starts to move in a rhythmically precise way, accompanied with lighting changes (from pink “pastel” to blue). Redshoes is “over acting” through her gestures, reinforcing the meanings and meter of the words, with closed eyes and exaggerated lip sinking: any resemblance with the Kate Bush video for “Wuthering Heights” (album “The Kick Inside”, 1978) is not coincidental.

⁷⁶ Marco Lopes: “How hard would it be to find a straight dancer to play the sailor? (...)”

Silvia Mendes: “Why the hell did you note the color of his skin? Since when is this relevant?”

Marco Lopes: “For me it is not the color of his skin, it was the fact that they chose a clearly gay “dude”, as if the fame that sailors already have isn’t enough. In the past years it has been impossible to find a male dancer who doesn’t have gay quirks, it looks like a lobby.”



Figure 3.2 - Rita Redshoes “Choose Love” (“Golden Era” 2008) video and Kate Bush’s “Wuthering Heights” (“The Kick Inside” 1978).

The exaggerated gestures and facial expressions reveal a dramatic embodied feeling, even more exacerbated in Kate Bush’s video. The singer-songwriter did not speak about Bush as a musical reference, but she assumes the “inspiration” of her video clip in the creation of this particular visual object. Nevertheless, the similarities between the two singer-songwriters are notable, as they share a great deal of personal and professional characteristic’s: they are both assumedly shy, escaping “social life” and avoiding all types of behavior commonly associated with pop-rock stars and celebrities; they dream a lot and use it as material to create; they trust their intuition as composers referring to the qualities of creative spontaneity; they assume, clearly, the influence of other arts, especially film, in their musical and visual production; they are “obsessive” with perfection pursuing it to the point of exhaustion; they know what they want for “their” sound and have clear ideas about orchestration, arrangement and acoustic design; they both see themselves as composers rather than singers or musicians⁷⁷; and, Bush has an album entitled “The Red Shoes” (1993), inspired by the homonymous film by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (1948).

When I asked Rita Redshoes about these performative characters and the different roles they play she replied:

“I like that contrast because I’m not like that in daily life, not at all. I am the opposite (...) I am a very shy person (...). The fact that I am a musician is a kind of revenge (...)

⁷⁷ “In 1993 [Kate Bush] stated: ‘I don’t think of myself as a musician ... [but] as a writer, I suppose. I only ever play the piano to accompany myself singing’ (Bush, *in* Maconie, 1993: 104). Despite these self-depreciating comments, she is a most capable accompanist (...)” (Moy, 2007: 47).

I was bullied in school because of my shyness (...) [Now] I am being more realistic. I was recording the video clip of the first single in this last album [“Her”] and it’s only me, singing. It’s something completely real (...) I am performing but not playing a role or a character when, in other videos, I created parallel histories” (personal interview, 13-10-2016).

The singer-songwriter’s “theatricality” and the fictional constructions in her music videos seem to contribute to her public perception as a pop singer rather than as an author. I asked some listeners, at the end of a concert⁷⁸, if they considered Redshoes to be a singer-songwriter and most of them were surprised when they realized that she composes her own music⁷⁹. As stated in the first chapter, singer-songwriters are perceived as “authentic” through their performative “naturalness”. As Rachel Haworth sustains, in her study of the most prominent singer-songwriters of the French *chanson* and of the Italian *canzone*: “(...) personas (i.e. presenting an identity to the audience which is not your true character) and performance (in terms of entertaining an audience and putting on a show) are not recognized elements of the conceptualization of singer-songwriters (...)” (Haworth 2013: 76).

Rita Redshoes’s latest music video based on the single “Life is huge” (album “Her”, 2016, directed by Marco Martins) where, as she herself stated, her performance is “completely real” marks a change in the singer-songwriter’s visual aesthetics. It is a black and white film that begins with the sound and image of heavy rain, followed by a female dancer performing movements that evoke physical strength and determination, with flashes of light punctuating the performance. Redshoes’s image (with formal ceremonial attire, hair and makeup) and her singing, intersect and sometimes overlap with the choreography. It is an “abstract” film, when compared with the previous videos - where a clear situation is created by the scenario and characters -, that stresses strength and freedom through the dancer’s vigorous movements. Being the video for the first single of an album dedicated to “feminine perspectives” (as stated by the singer-songwriter⁸⁰), it is impossible to view it and not see it as a statement for women’s

⁷⁸ A concert included in the popular festivities in Coruche, Alentejo, 18/08/2017.

⁷⁹ The listeners’ perceptions about the musicians characterized in this dissertation, as singer-songwriter or singers, is dealt with in the Conclusions (pp. 98-100).

⁸⁰ In “Rita Redshoes. E um novo par de sapatos” [“Rita Redshoes. And a new pair of shoes”]. Cláudia Sobral, in *Jornal i* [“i” newspaper], 11/11/2016.

freedom and empowerment. This “empowerment” can also be read in the inaudible screams of the dancers, as a voice of affirmation that looses itself from within.



Figure 3.3 - Images from “Life is Huge” music video (album “Her”, 2016).

This music video reflects Rita Redshoes’s motivations for writing this last album, expressed in an article/interview published in “Jornal i” [“i” newspaper]⁸¹:

[Rita Redshoes] - “It was not a deliberate choice [to make a political album]; I didn’t say: ‘I will write an album from a feminine perspective about the feminine’, but it happened and that is the key uniting all the songs.”

[Cláudia Sobral] – “Beginning with ‘Bird Hunter’, about freedom and independence, (...) ‘Life is Huge’ (...) about the urgency to live, ‘Bag of Love’, reflecting the tragedy of the refugees crises, and ‘Mulher’ [‘Woman’], a central theme followed by ‘Vestido’ [‘Dress’] (...) or the final ‘Sea Horse’, a metaphor using sea-horses to reflect upon children’s education. A feminist album emerging from within, a political message but with no thinking, written by impulse. Life stages?”

[Rita Redshoes] – “Yes, it has to do with me at this moment, my age - 35 -, the fact that I’m a woman; having doubts about being a mother, how will that affect my career. The priorities, and whether I will be able to respond to all the challenges: the society demands a lot from us (...) when I talk about this thing, feminism, one of my concerns is to think that the stereotypes where men and women are fitted are very castrating; a man is not allowed to be in touch with his feminine, more fragile side; being afraid of losing something (...). That is also very restrictive, so ‘Her’ is also them, their feminine side, a side where it is allowed to be in touch with yourself without having to fulfill the role of the male [macho], of the tough guy (...).”

⁸¹ “Rita Redshoes. E um novo par de sapatos” [“Rita Redshoes. And a new pair of shoes”]. Cláudia Sobral, in *Jornal i* [“i” newspaper], 11/11/2016.

About Rita Redshoes's comments, I would like to open a small parenthesis. The term "feminine" was the subject of large and intense theoretical debate within feminist movements at the end of the twentieth century. Nowadays, few essentialist frameworks advocate the existence of the "feminine" as a universal category. Scholarly research has demonstrated clearly that gender is socially constructed (Butler 1990; 2004). What, in fact, is "feminine"? My attention is drawn towards a contradiction in Rita Redshoes's discourse: she refers to gender stereotypes as "castrating", but she immediately naturalizes them, associating adjectives and characteristics to both men and women. Having said this, I understand the singer-songwriter's concern with the use of the word "feminism" and her focus on men's perspectives: frequently, this word alienates people, especially men who still think that "feminism" is something against them. As stated by Karen Offen: "To many people, inside and outside of the academy, the word 'feminism' continues to inspire controversy and to arouse a visceral response-indeed, even to evoke fear among a sizable portion of the general public" (Offen 1988: 119). Many authors feel that they need to protect their "feminist" work by explaining it, not as a threat, but as a space for freedom within normative frames of thought. That appears to be what Redshoes is trying to do here: find a balance between her motivations as a woman artist and what she thinks will be the public's reception and response to her driving forces. Further, as a mainstream singer-songwriter, she needs to sell albums and concert tickets, and she works with other people and institutions that certainly expect her to achieve commercial goals. Besides normative societal thinking, these expectations certainly constitute a higher level of oppression, that may constrict Rita Redshoes's public discourse. In this particular case, having financial return is vital for the singer-songwriter, since together with her agency ("Sons em Trânsito" ["Sounds in Transit"]) she paid for the recording and licensing of her last album (the label "Universal" promotes and distributes the final product). This "boldness" may give the author greater autonomy, but puts more pressure on sales results. Given this context, it is interesting to note the discursive differences regarding "Her". In our conversation, Redshoes made no references to any kind of gender binary dichotomies; instead, she showed an assertive position about her creative impulse and "identity":

"I started to write [the album "Her"] with no deadlines and, suddenly, all the lyrics were about women (...). I realized that and that is what it is (...). That is what I have to say now. There are thirteen songs about different women, with different perspectives,

according to my vision (...) that has to do with where I am as a woman (...). There is a story to tell that reflects a part of me, where I stand. And, I am not parts! I am!" (personal interview, 13-10-2016).

Redshoes's "feminist side" (as she calls it) is clearly expressed in songs from previous albums, as I will try to demonstrate in the following section.

The "feminist" songs: "Woman Snake" and "Bad Lila"

"Woman Snake" (from the album "Life is a second of love", 2014) is a powerful, rhythmic song, with multiple percussion layers. The cello adds "roughness" to the instrumental accompaniment and reinforces the melodic oriental flavor of the song. Vocally, the singer-songwriter's chest register confers a demanding, assertive "mood" to the song. More than most of her recorded songs, her voice appears to be "loose" and "intense" throughout the performance. The poem is straightforward (a rare characteristic in Redshoes's often "enigmatic" writing), and compares a woman with a snake - "the queen of the tribe" - that needs to bite to defend herself. There is also the inevitable relation to the biblical meaning of the snake and, intrinsically, to what it means to be a woman in Catholicism ("in the heaven you must fight for your right") and in society ("Like a woman in this town (...) Make a stand").

Woman, snake (repeated six times)

Like a snake in the desert
You must bite for your life
Like a snake, woman
Woman, snake
In the heaven
You must fight for your right

Bite, bite, bite for your life
Bite, bite
Bite, bite
With your heart like a storm
(...)
Like a woman in this town
Don't crawl, you're not a dog
Make a stand, they'll understand
You're a woman, not a snake
For god's sake

Like a snake in the desert
You must bite your life
Like a snake, woman

Woman, snake
You're the queen of this tribe (...)

The “objective” meaning of “Woman Snake” contrasts with the ambiguity of the next song, “Bad Lila”, from the album “Lights and Darks”, 2010. In this case, reading the lyrics is not enough to understand the singer-songwriter’s intentions. Because Rita Redshoes adds multiple layers of subtlety and ambiguity, my analysis for this song has to encompass lyrics, music, vocal interpretation and music video.

I'm a simple woman
Looking for her man
I think he's upset
'cause I slept with his friend
My heart is too honest
So I can't pretend
But I can't believe it
What I did to my man

My father once told me
That I was too wild
He said it was impossible
To get me to smile
Believe in my sorrow
This was not my plan
I still can't believe it
What I did to my man

[Refrain] Lila - You silly girl
Lila - I'll catch you with a pearl
Lila - It's time for you to grow
Lila - You'll end up with a gigolo
No, no, no, no!

I must admit
I see beauty in all...men
And I can't help myself
When they cast me their spell...hell
I know that it's hard for you to understand
But I'm just a girl full of love
Amen!

Well, it's time to tell you
What he's done to me
I kissed him all time
Asking for clemency
So he can't be good too
This is cruelty
Can you believe
What this man has done to me?!

[Refrain] Lila - Your silly mind
Lila - You're different from all your kind
Lila - Undo this mess

Lila - Take the road to happiness
Yes, yes, yes, yes

In this narrative, Lila is a multidimensional character: she sees herself as a “woman”, a “girl”, “simple”, “honest”, regretful and dazzled. She regrets her infidelity and asks for “clemency” while assuming her inability to resist the beauty in “all men” and to contain the amount of “love” she feels inside. Her father describes her as “wild”, unsmiling and others (or her inner self) as “silly”, easy to seduce, childish or teen (“it’s time for you to grow”), and “different” (from other women? From other Lilas?). Lila’s “man” fits the stereotype of the cheated boyfriend/husband: he doesn’t understand Lila’s interest in other men and, unable to “forgive”, reacts with “cruelty” to her infidelity. We don’t know the extent of his “cruelty”, the lyrics don’t explain what happened; instead, questions the listener: “Can you believe what this man has done to me?!”. Given the stereotyped behavior of “her man”, one could imagine that this “love” story didn’t end well. The lyrics of “Bad Lila” explore the submission and blame of a “silly”, “futile” girl, but also an emancipation or self awareness, a way of being that doesn’t fit the normative, expected behavior for a girl/woman: “Lila” sees beauty in all men and assumes it as an inherent characteristic of her personality; then she feels guilty and asks for forgiveness. The main character of the song seems to be objectifying men through their bodies: the “love” Lila expresses doesn’t fit the “romantic” and idealized love, often heard in songs about relations; Lila’s “love” for all men and their beauty clearly relates to sexual love. This is an uncommon theme “from the prevailing idealization of romantic love in mainstream popular music (Davis 1999:10)”. In this quote, Angela Davis is referring to the sexual love lyrics in blues music, focusing on the works of Gertrude Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, who “preached about sexual love, and in so doing they articulated a collective experience of freedom (...) (*idem*: 8). The context for these blues songs and “Bad Lila” is obviously very different; however, their effect - being separated by decades - is similar: “The representations of love and sexuality in women’s blues often blatantly contradicted mainstream ideological assumptions regarding women and being in love. They also challenge the notion that women’s ‘place’ was in the domestic sphere” (Davis 1999: 11).

This perspective establishes “Bad Lila’s” lyrics as emancipating, demanding sexual equality between sexes; but Lila’s personality can be read from multiple angles, and Redshoes gives the listener space and information to create his/her own reading. But

how does the story end? Assuming her infidelity and desire (for men in general) what happened to Lila? How was “her man” cruel? Did he walk away and ignore her? Was he violent towards her? What is “the road to happiness”?

When the music and its interpretation is added to the lyrics, some of these questions became clearer. The song starts with a banjo, followed by the drums with a swing, jazzy rhythmic pattern in a major key. The song is vivid, “unconcerned” and “light”. Rita Redshoes’s vocal interpretation can be characterized as ironic or “careless.” She appears to be interpreting another character, and the vocal timbre indexes irony, futility, and satire. Several words scattered throughout the poem evoke Catholicism, namely, “sorrow”, “hell”, “clemency” and “amen” and are emphasized by the music and the vocal interpretation. The repetition of “no, no, no”, and later “yes, yes, yes” is a vocal overlap, loaded with reverb, similar to the voices in church choirs. These religious references are reinforced by the following track of the album: church bells sounding immediately after the choir of “yes’s” introduce the next song, “Holy Ghost”. Here, a “choir” supports Redshoes’s solo singing: “I go to church / I must be forgiven / Deep in my soul / I know I’m a sinner / I look for love / And for the blessing of the Virgin / Could you care less / About my soul”. The bells keep playing for some time until a guitar reveals the harmony for the next song⁸²: “I’m on the road to happiness”. Rita Redshoes seems to develop “Lila’s” story in the following songs of the album, again by ambiguously playing with emancipation and submission, subjective and normative behavior.

This uncertain and dubious narrative in “Bad Lila’s” lyrics, is not found in “Bad Lila’s” video, made by Paulo Furtado⁸³, using a stop motion technique. Lila is a Barbie doll that, in the first scene has a hidden man in a drawer in her bedroom; “her man” is the representation of a singer, dressed like Elvis Presley, but with a skull.

⁸² In this sequence, we can see how Rita conceives her albums (specially “Lights and Darks” and “Life is a second of love”) through a story that links the narratives in each song.

⁸³ Musician and author known by the artistic name of “Legendary Tigerman”.



Figure 3.4 - “Bad Lila” main characters in Paulo Furtado’s music video. “Thirteen films about Lights and Darks” (DVD, 2010).

The video is full of characters, details, awkward situations, sometimes creating secondary narratives within the main narrative. Furtado emphasizes the implicit sexuality in the lyrics giving it multiple expressions: the “best friend” of “Lila’s man” is a figure wearing a bondage mask; the other “beautiful men” are Ken doll’s, showing their muscles; and, near the end, what appears to be an orgy takes place in a pool full of naked, dismembered bodies. At the same time, he represents the Catholic church, writing the word “amen” and showing an image of the Virgin Mary.



Figure 3.5 - “Bad Lila” referenced scenes in Paulo Furtado’s music video. “Thirteen films about Lights and Darks” (DVD, 2010).

Paulo Furtado’s reading of the song emphasizes Rita Redshoes’s intent to parody stereotyped behaviors: by using doll icons - in what can be seen as a critique to the capitalist objectification of the body, confirming “Lila’s” implicit objectification of men. The end of the video clearly reflects “Lila’s” emancipation. When the singer-songwriter performs “Well it’s time to tell you / what he’s done to me”, Paulo zooms the “boyfriend’s” skull (which can be read as an image representing death), creating a moment of suspense. Surrounded by the Ken dolls, the “boyfriend” is pulled into the water, while the toys reconfigure themselves. The video ends with “Lila” and all the “Kens” in her bed, moving through space and leaving (or, as the next song implies) on the “Road to Happiness”.

In sum, although “Bad Lila’s” lyrics, music and vocal interpretation are dubious and puzzling, through the music video it is possible to affirm that this song advocates for

women's sexual emancipation. The song may be unclear about what happened to "Lila", but the video's ending, where the character assumes her wishes and desires emancipating herself, is undoubtedly a feminist end.

Though Rita Redshoes's music, performance and discourse are often ambiguous, it is clear that gender related issues are a constant in the singer-songwriter's work. She also seems to deliberately veil the meaning of her lyrics through vocal "cleanness," a technique which overshadows the dramatic and emotional charge in her songs. In the next section I will analyze in more detail the first song written in Portuguese by the author, "Vestido" (from the album "Her" 2016). This song is an example of the singer-songwriter's subtlety addressing a sensitive issue such as sexual violence.

Songs about sexual abuse and "Vestido"

Sexual abuse is a common crime. In Portugal, APAV⁸⁴ registered in 2016, 329 sexual crimes, 82% against women. Because many people don't denounce abuse against them, we will never know the extent of this reality. The Portuguese platform for women's rights estimated that, in 2012, one in four women were victims of physical/sexual abuse. This is a worldwide phenomenon and many women singer-songwriters exposed publicly her personal experiences, in speeches - like Madonna, who referred to her rape when receiving the "Billboard Woman of the Year Award"- or in songs -, like Tori Amos, that narrates the overwhelming story of her sexual abuse in the song "Me and a Gun"⁸⁵. Performed *a capella*, this song is similar to a *lament*:

(...) Me and a gun
and a man
On my back
But I haven't seen Barbados
So I must get out of this

And do you know Carolina
Where the biscuits are soft and sweet
These things go through you head
When there's a man on your back

⁸⁴ Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima [Portuguese Association for Victim Support].

⁸⁵ According to Lankfort (2010: 146), "Me and a Gun" is a "public confession" that allows Amos persona to "share this trauma with other women who have had the same experience. In a sense, then, Amos' work on *Little Earthquakes* ends here, potentially leaving her personas, like multiple personas in the work of traditional singer-songwriters, as victims. Although these personas have bravely uncovered their pasts, it seems unclear whether they will now move beyond the past or remain defined by it."

And you're pushed flat on your stomach
It's not a classic Cadillac
(...)
"Me and a gun", from the album "Little Earthquakes" 1992.

Many singers-songwriters wrote about sexual abuse without implying themselves in the narrative, like Suzanne Vega in the song "Bad Wisdom" (album "99.9F", also from 1992). In the lyrics, the victim (and I am guessing Vega deliberately wrote it with no gender references) is talking to her mother, about the "secret" she/he has to bear. The age of the victim is not clear, but we can infer his/her young age:

Mother the doctor knows something is wrong
Cause my body has strange information
He's looked in my eyes and knows I'm not a child
But he doesn't dare ask the right question

Mother my friends are no longer my friends
And the games we once played have no meaning
I've gone serious and shy and they can't figure why
So they've left me to my own daydreaming
(...)

The mother's reaction is disconcertingly common:

Mother your eyes have gone suddenly cold
And it wasn't what I was expecting
Once I did think that I'd find comfort there
And instead you've gone hard and suspecting
(...)
"Bad Wisdom", from the album "99.9F", 1992.

Associated with fear of a new aggression, with other people's reaction or even a feeling of guilt (perpetuated historically by the sexist idea that women must have done something to instigate a sexual crime), many women don't talk about these situations and this remains a taboo in our "modern" societies. Music may have an important role addressing the issue publicly and creating a debate around the theme⁸⁶.

⁸⁶ Although in a different genre, Angela Davis addresses the theme of gender violence in the work of the blues singers Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith and Gertrude Rainey. In some of their songs, written by men, the "problem of male violence is named, and varied patterns of implied or explicit criticism and resistance are woven into the artists performances of them. Lacking, however, is a naming or analysis of the social forces responsible for black men's propensity (and indeed the male propensity in general) to inflict violence on their female partners" (1999: 33). Davis also notes that there are no references to sexual abuse in Smith's and Rainey's work and speculates why: "Black men were habitually represented as savage, sex-crazed rapists, bent on violating the physical and spiritual purity of the white womanhood (...). The difficult and delayed emergence of the beginnings of a collective consciousness around sexual harassment, rape, and incest within the black community is indicative of how hard it has been to acknowledge abuse perpetrated by the abused" (*idem*: 34).

In a very distinctive way, Rita Redshoes and Capicua wrote songs about sexual abuse. In her last album “Her” (2016), Redshoes recorded a song called “Vestido” [“Dress”], where she doesn’t refer explicitly to a sexual assault, though the theme and the story in the song can be read, very easily, through this perspective. The song had a previous version, written solely by Redshoes⁸⁷, performed publicly for the first time in the concert “Voz e Guitarra”⁸⁸ [“Voice and Guitar”], an important and renowned musical happening that joins on stage a considerable number of Portuguese musicians, most of them authors. The fact that Redshoes chose this particular event to perform a new song reflects the importance of the concert in the Portuguese musical context and the relevance of the song in the singer-songwriter’s repertoire. This is the first song written in Portuguese by Redshoes and it addresses a theme rarely dealt with in popular music, that of sexual abuse. The differences between the version presented in “Voz e Guitarra” and the song recorded in the album “Her” are considerable, especially in the lyrics. In the first version, also called “Vestido”, Rita Redshoes begins by singing “My dress seems too long / I cut it, I undo it in equal pieces of fear⁸⁹”, while in the recorded version - where the lyrics are also signed by Pedro da Silva Martins - the words immediately set a violent, abusive narrative, where the “long dress” is now “torn, injured / Naked at your will⁹⁰”. Although it is possible to observe the same ideas and characters in the two versions, as well as a symbolic and metaphoric language, the co-authored version seems more clear in terms of meaning and much more powerful visually and emotionally. In an article written by Gonçalo Frota⁹¹, where he presents the album “Her” track by track with the help of the author, we can read about “Vestido”:

“A disturbing song about the possibility that hovers around the lyrics that describe a rape, co-authored by Pedro da Silva Martins. [Redshoes:] ‘Pedro’s vision, of a violation, is more severe. I took it more in the sense of a psychological violation’, she caveats.

⁸⁷ In the recorded version of the song, the lyrics are co-authored by Pedro da Silva Martins, musician and author in the group Deolinda

⁸⁸ Terreiro do Paço, Lisboa, 3th and 4th July 2015. The program was divided between two consecutive days, featuring almost thirty Portuguese musicians. In this concert Rita Redshoes was accompanied by the prominent jazz guitarist Mário Delgado. There is another version of “Vestido” on Youtube, this time from a concert in Amarante (29-08-2015), where Rita performed solo, playing a keyboard with a piano register.

⁸⁹ “O meu vestido parece comprido de mais / corto-o, desfaço-o em pedaços de medo iguais”

⁹⁰ “O meu vestido rasgado, ferido, despido na tua vontade.”

⁹¹ “As 13 mulheres de Her” [“The thirteen women in Her”], Gonçalo Frota in *Ipsilon*, Público newspaper, 04/11/2016.

‘We wanted to wear the same dress, but clearly they don’t have the same colors. Perhaps Pedro is mourning and I am not’.

This is confusing. Why does the critic/journalist refer to the “possibility” of a rape when immediately after Rita Redshoes reveals that the song is about physical or psychological “violation”? Nevertheless, this shows the constant ambiguity surrounding Redshoe’s work, even when she is explicit. As I pointed out before, Rita uses veiled/ambiguous ways to express herself - in almost all aspects of her music and performance -, but I think this song is an exception. Although the lyrics float between explicit/implicit meanings, the musical composition does not index any kind of violence or aggression. Instead, it musically sets a harmonic/melodic “tapestry”, played by a string quartet, so that we can distinctively hear the story being told in the text.

Introduction – string quartet, bass, piano
D - G (6/8)

D (V)	G (I)	
O meu vestido rasgado, ferido		My dress torn, injured
D	G	
Despido na tua vontade		Naked in your will
D	G	
Espero que não seja tarde		I hope it is not too late
D	G	
Espero que não seja tarde		I hope it is not too late

(Same harmony)	
De fato escuro, perfeito e seguro	In a dark suit, perfect and reliable
Quiseste contar-me um segredo	You wanted to tell me a secret
Disseste: vem, não tenhas medo	You said: come, don’t be afraid
Disseste: vem, não tenhas medo	You said: come, don’t be afraid

Chorus:	
Bb	Dm
E agora que chamam por mim	And now someone is calling me
Am	Gm
Estou longe, tão longe	I’m far, so far away
Bb	Dm
A voz quem me tira daqui	The voice that takes me out of here
Am	Gm D
Está longe, tão longe, de mim	It is far, so far away, from me

Instrumental (similar to the introduction)

A minha vida fiada à medida	My life, cut to measure
Traída à flor de um desejo	Betrayed to the flower of a desire
Cativa à força de um beijo	Captive to the force of a kiss
Cativa à força de um beijo	Captive to the force of a kiss
Vestido forçado, por ti enganado	Forced Dress, deceived by you
De alma e corpo vazio	With empty soul and body
Corram que eu estou por um fio,	Run because I’m hanging by a thread,

Corram que eu estou por um fio
Chorus x2

Instrumental - (ending with a longer chord in D)

Run because I'm hanging by a thread
Chorus x2

The poem is written - like many of Redshoes's poems - in the first person. This is a resource used to personally interpret the piece, and it doesn't mean the song is autobiographical. Poetically, it introduces two characters, presented by their clothes: a "torn" dress, and a "dark, reliable" suit. By convention, it seems obvious that Redshoes is referring to a woman and a man. Also in an explicit way we find deception, power/domination, violence and pain. Implicitly, the "perfect" "dark suite" suggests someone with a relevant social status and a "respectable" public image; the female character's inability to speak or scream indicates trauma, captivity.

Musically, the songs start with a short introduction, played by the violins, double bass and piano; a stable melodic line, going back and forth supported by two major chords, D and G. The major key, "semiotically associated with hope" (McClary⁹² 2002: 158), the "smoothness" in vocal and instrumental timbre, the soft dynamics in the strings, the "simplicity" of the melodic line and the predictable oscillation between two chords help us understand why this introduction sets a relaxed, "neutral", predictable "space" and mood. We don't really have to concentrate on it, as it repeats itself and when Redshoes starts singing, the focus is on her voice and the meaning of the words. Also, the melodic line is harmonically consonant, avoiding any type of musical tension or friction while the singer is telling us what happened. In the first verse the strings, playing in pizzicato, accentuate the second pulse, introducing a "danceable" rhythm. The voice accentuates the tempo, consequently stressing the correct syllabic accentuation (or vice versa) creating a rhythmic flow, in time, with a precise diction. Vocally, Rita uses a chest register, in a low range, with no ornaments or inflections, which can be read as a metaphor for safety and reliability. At the same time, singer-songwriter's the performance style places her in the role of an outsider narrating the story like a witness. The predictable harmonic oscillation between two chords is maintained in the verses and suddenly interrupted in the refrain. An unexpected modulation to B flat major immediately creates another musical atmosphere, given the tonal detached relation between the G and B flat. It results in the creation of a "hopeful" suspension, leading the listener to imagine that something in the story will change. Rita Redshoes

⁹² According to the author: "(...) the semiotics of tonal music associate major with affirmative affective states (hope, joy) and minor with negative states (sadness, depression)" (McClary 2002: 142).

immediately “destroys” that idea, of a different narrative, using a minor sequence to express the victim’s distance and lack of voice: from the “deceitful” B flat major, the harmony moves to D minor, A minor and G minor. The words “far away” are sang in the minor version of the tonic, a very distant “place” from where the song begins (G major); in my perspective, Redshoes reinforces the lyrics’ meanings through the use of a “descriptive” harmony, while the melody moves slowly, within the same notes, relating to the female character’s immobility, lack of voice and hopelessness.

In a way, the singer-songwriter deceives the listener in a similar way that the woman in the story is deceived, by setting a comfortable, secure space. It appears that Redshoes’s intention was to create an emotional “trap”, paradoxically playing with musical and poetic meanings. It is also interesting to note that in the first version of the song the tonality was not G major but G minor. The harmonic pattern played by Redshoes on the piano (in the Amarante version) and the one played by Mário Delgado (in the “Voz e Guitarra” concert) between two minor chords, were conceived to carry a “dramatic” charge that we cannot experience in the arrangement made by Chandler for the album “Her”. Although the lyrics are different, and much more obvious in this last version, a simple change to a major tonality completely transforms the listeners’ “expectations” on what the song could be about and certainly accentuates the deceitful feeling experienced by the female character in the tune.

Rita Redshoes was part of a group of women invited to sing and record the song “Cansada” [“Tired”], written by Rodrigo Guedes de Carvalho for the twenty-fifth anniversary of APAV. This song addresses domestic violence in a very direct way, with no linguistic euphemisms, while the music and the arrangement sets a “naïve”, relaxed atmosphere. This initiative reflects how some organizations working in this field conceive of music (as other arts) as a medium for increasing the public’s awareness recognition of violence. This participation probably influenced Redshoes’s later writing of “Vestido”.

The singer-songwriter Capicua also wrote a song about sexual abuse, in partnership with the rapper Valete: “Medusa” from the album with a homonymous title published in 2015. In order to contextualize the song, in the next chapter I will briefly describe the singer song-writer’s musical trajectory, political motivations and agency, mostly using her own words.

Chapter IV

Multiple Voices: Capicua

Capicua's music and performance "challenges and threatens established order"⁹³ (Koskoff 1987:10), through a highly politicized/activist speech, empowered by rap and hip-hop beats. Her voice embodies and expresses a multiplicity of voices: a biographical voice⁹⁴, revealing personal experiences, childhood, wishes and commitments; a political and social voice that exposes power, financial interests and oppression mechanisms; a "gendered" voice - as agency to awareness and women's emancipation -, representing women and their realities, gender asymmetries and gender violence. Through her personal engagement in such themes, expressed in public contexts⁹⁵, Ana - the woman - and Capicua - the singer - share the same voice, on stage and in life, linking "embodied expression with social agency"⁹⁶. Capicua's "voice", both empirical and metaphorical, conquered respect and admiration within the Portuguese musical mainstream.

Diary entry 02-12-2016:

Capicua's concert 02-12-2016, Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon

Capicua presented herself with a new band format in CCB 's largest hall (1200 seats). She was accompanied by a band (drums, bass, keyboards, two dj's and the rapper M7). The hall was almost full and observed the audience entering the auditorium: small groups of women, couples ranging from fifteen to sixty years old and children, lots of children. I was surprised by the audience's heterogeneity. Most people were laughing and talking in a lively way. A group of women (perhaps in their fifties) talked about Capicua's songs with reverence and three others spoke about "Vayorken" as probably

⁹³ According to the performance categorization proposed by Ellen Koskoff (page 3 and 105-6).

⁹⁴ Among others, in the songs: "1º dia" ["First Day"], "A Volta" ["The return"], "Casa no campo" ["Country house"], "A última" ["The last"] in "Capicua" (2012); "Vayorken", in "Sereia Louca" (2014).

⁹⁵ She writes weekly in "Visão" magazine, participates in multiple academic events and signs a program in Antena 3 public radio station.

⁹⁶ Feld and Fox refer the difference between the "empirical voice" - "the embodied locus of spoken and sung performance" - and the "metaphorical voice" - "a metaphor for difference, a key representational trope for identity, power, conflict, social position, and agency. This connection explores how vocality is a social practice that is locally understood as a conventional index of authority, evidence, and experiential truth. As such, voice and vocality is a particularly significant site for the articulation of opposition and difference. (...) 'giving voice' (...), 'having voice' are so linked to the politics of identity, to the ability of the subaltern to speak, to the ability of indigeneity movements to 'talk back' and class, gender, and race politics to 'back talk' the dominant" (Feld, Fox 2000: 161).

the worst song in the singer-songwriter's repertoire, although the most heard on the radio and the best known; they regretted the fact, saying: "she has so many great songs...". An heterosexual couple (maybe sixteen or seventeen years old) caught my eye: the young man was very excited, singing and jumping around while she seemed unenthusiastic and somewhat reticent with his behavior.

This is not a "typical" space for a rap/hip-hop concert. It's a "formal" hall and, because of that, most people remained seated for a long time, hearing attentively, clapping between songs and lip sinking throughout the concert. Capicua was wearing casual, comfortable clothes and it was not long before she started jumping and dancing on stage. She addressed the audience several times, first saying that this concert was the result of a long process, where she selected her favorite songs and the ones people frequently ask her to perform. She kept asking if the audience was ok, and people reacted with increasing intensity. After the song "Casa no campo" ["Country House"] - a song about life wishes and dreams - she made her first statement: "Unfortunately life is not just pink, like this song (...) sometimes we need hard words (...)". Succeeding she performed "Jugular" ["Jugular"] and "Medo do Medo" ["Fear of Fear"], two songs that reflect the Portuguese social and political context in the years of the economic recession. People reacted enthusiastically, clapping, dancing and singing, although the lyrics are extremely fast and intricate. These politically engaged songs mirror social issues that most people feel in their daily lives and I could almost feel a revolutionary buzz when the rapper said: "They fear you don't fear!". Later, Capicua talked about the "women who cross the Tejo river, who have two or three jobs, who leave their kids at home and carry thousands of years of enslavement and patriarchal [people cheered and whistled enthusiastically]. It speaks of the women in the Cacilheiro⁹⁷, but it is about all working class women." I could not resist looking at the adolescent couple I saw in the lobby before the concert: they were right in front of me, and it was very interesting to see him sing loudly "na na na p'ra ser rainha nunca foi preciso um rei!" [To be a queen a king was never needed!] while she remained seated, looking at him, with a funny smile. Two little girls danced on the auditorium's stairs throughout the concert.

⁹⁷ Cacilheiro is the boat that connects the Tejo river banks.

Capicua recorded her first album entitled “Capicua” (2012) independently, with friends, in an indie context. Later, she sent it to various publishers and Henrique Amaro - from Otimus Discos - proposed to her to publish a low cost album and make it available on an online platform where people could download it for free. The production and promotion work made by Otimus Discos was important in Capicua’s public visibility, especially in the media: positive and enthusiastic critics triggered curiosity and interest, allowing her to attract a broader spectrum of listeners, outside the hip-hop community. When I asked her about this exponential interest in her work, Capicua stressed, firstly, her quality as a rapper but also two particular prejudices - that she recurrently deconstructs in her songs - , that were extremely “useful” in the disclosure of her work:

“I’m exotic because I’m a woman, I’m exotic because I’m educated; I’m different because I use a different language. They [the media] were also interested in me because there is a narrow view about rap in Portugal (...) this was very useful to me but also ungrateful to my peers, because it is based on this biased and pre-conceived idea that rappers are kids from the suburbs that speak about drugs and use jargon.” (Personal interview 20-05- 2016).

The stereotyped image of the “tribe” to which she belongs⁹⁸, ironically helped her to succeed, together with the lack of women in the rap/hip-hop universe. Regarding this last point, Capicua wrote:

“The fact that there aren’t many women in Hip-hop (like in other musical genres!) happens because, in our patriarchal culture, we don’t socialize women to conquer public space, to competitiveness, to opine, to leadership (...) not just in music but in politics, business management, high competition sports and many other spheres.”⁹⁹

In 2013, also in an *indie* context, Capicua published the Mixtape “Capicua Goes West” financed and promoted by her. This album was supported by the media’s interest and the popularity she achieved through her first CD. This was also a successful album

⁹⁸ Capicua emphasizes frequently and vehemently that her work is the result of a movement, of a “broader culture”, of a “genealogy”.

⁹⁹ “O que é que está mal neste conjunto? - o exotismo e a exceção na minha relação com os media” [“What’s wrong with this set? - exoticism and exception in my relationship with the media”] in “Barómetro Social” [“Social Barometer”]. This article was sent to me by the author, however, I couldn’t access the full publication or find the publication’s date.

which led to an invitation by Valentim de Carvalho¹⁰⁰ to represent her. With this label, Capicua recorded and published “Sereia Louca” [“Crazy mermaid”] in 2014, “Medusa” [“Medusa”] 2015, and “Mão Verde” [“Green hand”] 2016, with the musician and author Pedro Geraldes. When I asked the singer-songwriter if her creative freedom was in some way affected by signing with a major label, Capicua affirmed that only positive things happened since: “this was my first experience as a professional musician, the first time I recorded in a professional studio (...) the first time I was able to pay the people that worked with me (...).” She stressed that Valentim de Carvalho doesn’t interfere in her creative process since it is in their best interest to maintain Capicua’s “artistic identity”, “sound” and “history” (like they do with most of the artists coming from an alternative, indie circuit). This professionalizing step allowed her to have more time in the studio, assisted by highly qualified technicians, to work with greater detail and to use the best technical resources available, especially in vocal recording.

Capicua’s voice changed through time (apart from the obvious physical changes) as she attended vocal (spoken) classes to improve her diction and breathing; she also stopped smoking, which gave her a “cleaner” timbre and she is constantly looking for a musical base that enhances her vocal skills and allows vocal comfort. The biggest challenge, in the recording studio, is to find a voice that expresses particular emotions for each theme:

“It is very common to hear people saying that in my concerts the music is much cooler than in the albums. I also sense that. In a live concert I feel emotions in a way that I cannot experience in the studio... and I really don’t like recording so much, I always feel stressed with a lot of technical and aesthetic concerns. I am always looking for all the words to be perfect (...), so I am aware that emotions are not so intense as they should be. My aim is to record a studio quality album with the emotion of a live concert. I have to work more” (Personal interview 20-05- 2016).

Empowering Women

Having an informed, reflexive and clear view about gender bias and the role of women in maintaining convention, Capicua’s work continuously attempts to deconstruct

¹⁰⁰ In “NorteSul”, Valentim de Carvalho’s label devoted to artists within an indie context.

normative behavior through the use of provocative and empowering discourse. She explores multiple dimensions and aspects that contribute to women's emancipation:

1) Recognition and validation of her own work

Esta merda é toda minha,
esta terra ainda não tinha
uma MC de jeito,
virei abelha rainha,
meu nome hoje é Vitória,
faço moça, faço história,
faço troça dessa escória
que só coça a micose e quer glória!
Queres escola eu dou-te,
cala a boca e ouve,
isto implica compromisso e um full-time é pouco.
(...)

This shit is all mine
This land didn't have
a good [female] MC
so I became the queen bee
and today my name is Vitória [victory]
I cause impact, I make history,
I mock the scum
That does nothing and wants glory!
You want school, I'll give it to you
Shut up and listen
This implies commitment and full-time is not
enough (...)
"Maria Capaz", from the album "Capicua" 2012

Olá bom dia, Capicua no Rec
Tu habitua-te Reco, que a minha cena é o Rap!
(...)
Sou como o Obelix, não preciso de poção
A minha caneta é mágica, a tinta é do caldeirão
Não sou hiperescolarizada para fazer Rap
Muito menos sobrevalorizada por ser mulher
Pois não fui eu que fugi ao estereótipo
Apenas continuo grande demais para o teu rótulo
(...)

God morning, Capicua no Rec
Get used to it "Reco", because my thing is Rap!
(...)
I'm like Obelix, I don't need a potion
My pen is magical, the ink comes from the cauldron
I'm not hyper schooled to make Rap
Or over valued because I'm a woman
I'm not the one who escaped the stereotype
I'm just too big for your label
(...)

"Feias, Porcas e Más" ["Ugly, pigs and evil"] by Capicua, M7, Tamin, Eva from "Capicua Goes West"
(Mixtape Vol.II, 2013)

2) Sexual freedom and emancipation.

Here, the rapper who always performs live with Capicua, M7¹⁰¹, has an important role writing the most daring and provocative lyrics. The rappers partnership happens in live and in recorded works of Capicua but also in the M7 mixtape "Martataca". About the M7 collaboration in the song "Mão pesada" ["Heavy Hand"], Capicua emphasized that she "needed Marta because she shares

¹⁰¹ M7 is one of Marta Bateira's heteronymous. She is also Beatriz Gosta - a character created with Capicua -, that talks about sex with no taboos. Marta described herself in "Sábado" magazine (15-03-2015) as "irreverent, feminist, hardcore".

with [her] this political agenda of motivating women to be more spontaneous,
free and with more self-esteem¹⁰²;

Dou-te com a mão pesada
Quando é carinho ou quando é castigo
Olho de cara lavada
Quando te digo que sou perigo

Eu só tenho uma palavra
Dita na cara, clara como água
Eu agarro, não abraço
Dás o dedo eu quero o braço
(...)
Se o homem não se comporta, troca o canhão da porta
E depois sai louca p'ra beijar na boca à carioca
Porque tem pêlo na venta, Kahlo [Calo] como a Frida
Na vida, não se lamenta, aguenta de cabeça erguida.
(...)

I give you a heavy hand
When it is affection or when it is punishment
I look with a washed face
When I tell you I'm dangerous

I only have one word
Said in your face, clear as water
I grab, I do not hug
You give me the finger, I want the arm.
(...)
If the man does not behave, she changes the door's lock
And then she goes out crazy to kiss in the mouth like a Rio's woman / Because she has hair on her face, Kahlo [Callus] like Frida
In life, she does not complain, she holds her head up.
(...)

“Mão pesada” [“Heavy Hand”] Capicua, M7 / D-one, from “Sereia Louca” (2014)

(...)
Chamas-me brega por falar de sexo sem tabus
“Pêga” por gostar de sexo como tu
(...)
Não oprimas alguém que tem a coragem
De cagar para o que é suposto e olha que o preço é alto
Eu sou assim, quem não gosta beira do prato!
(...)

(...)
You call me brega for talking about sex without taboos / "Whore" for liking sex like you do
(...)
Do not oppress someone who has the courage
To shit on what is expected - and look, the price is high
I'm like that, whoever does not like it, can stay at the edge of the dish!
(...)

“Egotriptico”, Capicua e M7, DJ Ride from “Medusa” (2014)

(...)
Dá-me um deus grego
ou dá-me um Deus de Ébano
não sou de ferro
não nego que um homem como tu,
deixa-me rouca,
fico louca,
com agua na boca,
pouca roupa,
mão na coxa,
hummm isso já é tabu
(...)

(...)
Give me a Greek god
Or an ebony god
I'm not made of iron
I do not deny that a man like you,
leaves me hoarse,
crazy,
mouth watering,
half naked,
hand on thigh,
hummm, this is already taboo.
(...)

Tabu [“Taboo”] M7 e Capicua in M7 Mixtape “Martataca” (2008)

¹⁰² In “Uma Sereia Louca chamada Capicua” [“A crazy mermaid named Capicua”], Simão Freitas in Strobe, 15/07/2014.

3) Description of women's life's and the multiple oppressions they suffer on a daily basis;

(...)

Ali no meio das mulheres do barco da madrugada,
Sente a fadiga da lida, da faxina e da faina pesada
Sofre da dupla jornada, pra pôr comida na mesa
Com a força de matriarca que arca com a despesa
E entre toda aquela gente, ela é só mais uma preta
Só mais uma imigrante, empregada da limpeza
(...)

(...)

There among the women of the dawn boat,
She feels the fatigue from cleaning and heavy
work / She suffers from the double journey, to put
food on the table / With a matriarch strength of
who pays the expenses / And among all those
people, she's just one more black / Just another
immigrant, cleaning maid (...)

“Mulher do Cacilheiro” [“Woman in the Cacilheiro”] in “Sereia Louca” (2014)

4) The use of metaphors that reveal “ambiguities, shadows and lights, anguishes and emotions, realities¹⁰³.”

The next two examples, both from “Sereia Louca”, illustrate Capicua’s objective in this album to “speak about women in an opposite way to what you always see and hear in pop, the nice and beautiful women¹⁰⁴”:

(...)

Se me quiserem presa, se me fizerem escassa
Se o meu corpo não chega para a vossa festança
Serei uma ameaça, darei luta
Enquanto for engarrafada, vendida, poluta
Pela puta da indústria que me suja
E que depois me quer privada me rotula, sua (...)

If they want me imprisoned, if they make me
scarce
If my body is not enough for your feast
I'll be a threat, I'll fight
As long as I'm bottled, sold, polluted
By the industry, that bitch, that messes me up
And wants me private, labeled: yours (...)

“Líquida” [“Liquid”] from “Sereia Louca” (2014)

(...)

Quando não estou luminosa, todos me acham
invisível,
mas é aí que eu me renovo, mulher nova,
invencível, procuram pela antiga face, mas são
fases e eu mudo, (...)
sou orgulhosa de ser fruto da realidade, já tenho
idade, tenho marcas no corpo, crateras no peito,
(...)

(...)

When I am not luminous, everyone thinks I am
invisible,
But that's when I renew myself, young woman,
invincible, they look for my old face, but these are
phases and I change, (...)
I am proud to be a fruit of reality, I am old, I have
marks on the body, craters on the chest,
(...)

“Luas” [“Moons”] from “Sereia Louca” (2014)

¹⁰³ “Uma Sereia Louca chamada Capicua” [“A crazy mermaid called Capicua”], Simão Freitas in Strobe, 15/07/2014.

¹⁰⁴ *Idem*.

Capicua has the political maturity that allows her - without losing clarity and poetic subtlety - to offer her listeners the deconstruction of dense contents from a critical perspective. Her lyrics provide a source for critical analysis, from different perspectives, on the systems of domination that shape the world. The receptivity that the author has had in the Portuguese musical scene seems to demonstrate the avidity of the public in general for these themes. I would argue that the songs I have listed speak for themselves, as well as the next song, “Medusa”.

“Medusa features multiple narratives of aggression, combining the harsh reality of violence against women with the mythological figure of Medusa using, as a link, sentences from two poems¹⁰⁵ by Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, declaimed by the author herself. The invocation of the poet’s physical presence (deceased in 2004) through her voice, can be read as the element linking reality and myth, acting as a metaphor for the rappers own work.

(Nas confusas redes do seu pensamento
prendem-se obscuras medusas)

Ela é medusa
A vítima que toda a gente acusa
E de quem a vida abusa
Ela é Medusa e recua e recusa
E resiste, ele insiste e arranca-lhe a blusa e usa-a
Escusa, ela acua, sozinha na rua
Seminua
Semi-sua
Semi-morta!
Porque mais ninguém se importa!
Ela é Medusa
O corpo pra que toda a gente aponta
Que posta, não gosta faz troça, desmonta
Comenta, ali exposta na montra
De fita métrica pronta
Examina-se a carne
E critica-se a? coisa?
O resto não conta
É uma sombra

(Uma medusa em vez de coração) (Bis)

(In the confused train of your thought,
dark Medusas trapped)

She is medusa
The victim that everybody accuses
Who life abuses
She is medusa and she draws back and refuses,
And resists, he insists and rips her shirt off and
uses her
Half naked
Half yours
Half dead!
Because nobody cares
She is Medusa
The body that everybody points to
Exhibit, don’t like it, mocks, dismantles
Comments, displayed in the window shop
Tape measure at the ready
Examine the flesh
And criticizes the object
The rest doesn’t count
It is a shadow

(A Medusa instead of a heart)

¹⁰⁵ “Uma Medusa em vez de coração” [“A Medusa instead of a heart”], from the poem “Navio Naufragado” [“Shipwreck”] and “Nas confusas redes do seu pensamento prendem-se obscuras Medusas” [In the confused train of your thought, dark Medusas trapped], from the poem “Marinheiro sem Mar” [“Sailor without sea”].

Refrão:
Por cada vítima acusada
E transformada em monstro
Em cada casa, cada caso
Cada cara e cada corpo
Em mais um dedo apontado ao outro
Cresce a ira da Medusa que me vês no rosto

(Valete)
Em cima da ponte está a tua irmã desaparecida
em interação com aqueles instintos suicidas
abatida na depressão duma história nunca
esquecida
vencida por um trauma de uma violação aos 15
Em cima da ponte está a mulher que bombardeiam
Por usar a liberdade sexual tão proclamada
Degolada por tantas ofensas que vocês fraseiam
Exterminada pelo nojo daqueles que a rodeiam
Em cima da ponte está Maria Conceição
Vítima de uma relação e de um amor tirano
Marcada pela opressão e traumatismos cranianos
Golpeada por quase 20 anos de agressão doméstica
Em cima da ponte está a tua vizinha acanhada
Há muito aniquilada por esperanças que se
esfumam
Há muito rebaixada por vexames que se avolumam
Embaraçada pelo próprio corpo que todos
repugnam
Em cima da ponte

(Nas confusas redes do seu pensamento
prendem-se obscuras medusas)

Refrão
Ela é Medusa
A miúda de que toda a gente fala
Na rua, na sala de aula, e à baila
Vem ela, a cadela, a perdida, sem trela
Vadia, cautela com ela
Que é livre, e vive
A vida dela

Como se atreve?
Aquele

Ela é Medusa
Aquele de que mais ninguém tem pena
Que apanha, sem queixa, que deixa e aguenta
Aquele que pensa que o amor é pra sempre
E na crença, sofre em silêncio

Só
Completamente só
Esconde a nódoa negra com o pó

Refrão
É a minha ira, a nossa ira, a ira
A minha ira, a nossa ira, a ira

Chorus:
For each victim accused
And turned into a monster
In each house and in each case
Each face and each body
On one more finger pointed at the other
The anger of the Medusa that you see in my face
grows

(Valete)
On the bridge is your missing sister
In interaction with those suicidal instincts
Depressed in a never forgotten story
Defeated by a trauma of a violation at fifteen
On top of the bridge is a woman being bombed
For using the proclaimed sexual freedom
Beheaded by so many offenses that you say
Exterminated by the disgust of those who surround
her
On top of the bridge is Maria da Conceição
Victim of a relationship and a tyrant love
Marked by oppression and head trauma
Struck by almost twenty years of domestic
aggression
On the bridge is your shy neighbor
Long annihilated by hopes that vanish
Long humiliated
Embarrassed by one's own body that everyone
repulses
On top of the bridge

(In the confused train of your thought,
Dark Medusas trapped)

Chorus
She is Medusa
The girl that everyone talks about
On the street, in the classroom, in the talks on the
subject
Come on, the bitch, the lost, no leash
Bitch, be careful with her.
That is free, and lives her life

How dare she?
That

She is Medusa
The one that no one pities
Beaten up, she bears without complaint
The one who thinks that love is forever
And in belief suffers in silence

Alone
Completely alone
Hide the bruises with powder

Chorus
It is my anger, our anger, the anger,
my anger, our anger, the anger,

É a minha ira, a nossa ira, a ira
(Uma medusa em vez de coração)

It is my anger, our anger, the anger,
(A Medusa instead of a heart) (bis)

“Medusa¹⁰⁶” - Capicua and Valete, beat by Roger Plexico (2015)

In our last conversation, Capicua listed her motivations and goals when writing this song:

“I chose to call this song “Medusa” because of the mythological Medusa, accused of her own rape; the victim that becomes a monster and transforms others into monsters. No one wants to look at her, everybody ignores her because no one wants to be contaminated with guilt. I think that metaphor is very clear (...) and it is something omnipresent in the way we view the violence against women. The permanent accountability of the victim is the fundamental trace that defines all forms of violence against women, sexual or others. Then I wanted to show that that violence is not only physical and sexual. I expressed it in four dimensions: the first is the sexual, the idea of accusing the victim because she wasn’t discreet enough vis-a-vis an “incontrollable masculine” impetus; the second would be the violence of conditioning women’s sexual freedom at its basic level - a young man with a lot of girlfriends/lovers is a “garanhão” while an young woman is a “whore” -, a very oppressive idea that a woman can’t express desire or its fulfillment in an autonomous way, without asking for permission or without being in a marriage or in a relationship with a man. That is a form of violence and when you are younger it is hard to deal with that finger pointed at you (...). A woman who expresses her self-esteem, certainty and freedom to assume her libido and live with it in an autonomous way is automatically repressed because of an idea that such behavior is exclusive to men. The third idea, briefly, is body shaming, associated with social media. The idea that we need to correspond to an expectation and that everything out of that norm has to be repressed, corrected and discouraged (...) the sexual or body conditioning violence is extremely present in the internet. Finally, domestic violence (...), inside a marriage or in a relationship. I wrote this music also because this is an epidemic (...)” (Personal interview, 6-7-2017).

Capicua’s approach is very different from that of Rita Redshoes. The text is straightforward and touches on painful aspects, without euphemisms and aesthetic

¹⁰⁶ Album “Medusa” published in 2015, Valentim de Carvalho.

subtleties. Valete shares these characteristics, but he creates a more personal narrative by personalizing the victims. This is an interesting counterpoint with Capicua's mythological metaphor, since it draws the song's content from general situations to specific cases that relate, by proximity, with the listener ("your sister", "your neighbor"). When I asked Capicua why she invited Valete to participate and create an entire part for the song she replied:

"I wanted to have a man's voice in the tune. It is very important, not for me, but for the listeners, especially for the male listeners, so that they wouldn't develop some kind of immunity towards the song; (...) I didn't want this to be seen as "a woman against men thing". That only brings noise to the debate of gender questions, blocking serious conversations on the topic. With him entering the song, I thought men would listen to it with another availability" (Personal interview, 6-7-2017).

I couldn't ask Rita Redshoes why she invited Pedro da Silva Martins to write "Vestido" with her, but I can speculate that she did it with the same objective. I say it having in mind that both singer-songwriters are aware that a feminist discourse can generally provoke adverse reactions and detract from constructive dialogue on gender ideologies. The rapper was very clear when describing her feminist position and attitude, on and off stage:

"(...) I can have an attitude of extreme self-confidence on stage and say things in an aggressive way because people will associate that with a rapper's posture when performing, not with the attitude of a feminist woman. In my persona, both things are intertwined and the most feminist thing I can do is to be on stage, proud, especially within hip-hop, a misogynist and masculine genre. (...). There is a backlash with feminism... the feminazi thing, the pain in the ass women (...). I do not feel these hostile reactions to my music because I don't believe in going against men or seeing things in a binary way - that is ridiculous. (...) I believe men are also victims of patriarchy... it is very heavy for them, not in terms of health, safety and survival - it is much easier to live being a man -, but the expectations on men are also very high. I speak to people that do not fit the norm (...), that cannot find an alternative to it; this emancipating idea is to share with everyone. Now, women first, obviously" (Personal interview, 6-7-2017).

Musically, “Medusa” is a tapestry oscillating between two minor chords, starting with what appears to be a woman’s voice (although ambiguous) singing a seven note melodic line (recurrently played throughout the song, with different sonorities), evoking an ethereal atmosphere, easily suggesting the mermaids mythological singing universe. The beat, created by Roger Plexico, accentuates the dramatic and realist character of the lyrics, through the use of minor tonalities and the constant overlapping of transformed and reverberating sonorities - like musical “shadows” -, that reinforce a sense of confusion, disorientation, and discomfort.

Using different ways and aesthetics to address the issue, both Rita Redshoes and Capicua created songs that bring sexual abuse to the public space. Although it is impossible to affirm that these songs stimulate a debate around the theme, their existence may help women not feel so isolated and encourage them to share their own experiences publicly. Through her subjectivities and socially informed agency, Capicua is changing listeners’ perspectives on gender, and making way for other women whose goal is to rap.

Chapter V

Aline Frazão's gender and political activism: from "delicate girl" to "bad ass"

"Four years ago I attended a concert by a singer-songwriter I did not know at the 'Maré de Agosto Festival'¹⁰⁷ [Santa Maria Island, Azores]. She had a gentle presence and an remarkable closeness with the audience. I loved her songs and I bought an album that has always been with me. In a way, I became a fan. This year I went to see another concert¹⁰⁸ and felt something completely different: a coldness, a distance, it was not the same person! (...) the music was dirtier, with electric guitars... it was no longer that perfect thing that you hear and relax, but something more engaged, something to instigate in the audience different feelings from the ones I had in Santa Maria. I did not know the new songs, but even the older ones that I knew well were... I don't know... raw?! There was this need to put them in a language...less sweet... cold (...). I think it's contrived to make a difference... but why change so much? I was expecting that tranquillity, that sweetness, the softness in her singing (...) sometimes I couldn't understand the text, which annoyed me... and there's that thing with her language¹⁰⁹, very accentuated, I think" (Personal interview with Ana, 6-12-2016).

In this quote Ana, a fan of Aline Frazão, is referring to the contrast she felt between the albums and tours of "Movimento" (2013) and "Insular" (2015). Like no other singer-songwriter dealt with in this dissertation, the differences between her three published albums are enormous. Through the analysis of musical compositions, performance - especially vocal interpretation -, image, discourse and agency, I believe it is possible for the listener to draw an outline of Aline Frazão's biography and the historical, social and gender asymmetries on the basis of her albums.

¹⁰⁷ This concert was included in the singer-songwriter's tour for the album "Movimento" ["Movement"], published in 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Alluding to another concert in Ponta Delgada (Teatro Micaelense, 29-10-2016) from the album "Insular" tour, published in 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Referring to the particular accent in Aline Frazão's speech.

Toward a vocal biography | The scream

Aline Frazão was born in Angola and initiated her musical activity at the age of nine, singing fado in the Associação 25 de Abril [25th April Association] in Luanda almost every week, accompanied by Portuguese and acoustic guitars. The challenge was to “fill a large room” with her “small voice”:

“I dedicated myself, from a very early stage, to expressiveness rather than technical aspects. Obviously I was concerned with fine tuning, but my focus was the expression, the word; trying to make people cry not by the impact, or the power, but through interpretation. So, I developed that since my young age, the pauses, the silences and... I was not happy with my voice. I thought I had a small voice and I was very shy, very retracted, I couldn’t release myself and I was very nervous, shaking a lot before singing” (Personal interview 16-11-2016).

Later, when Aline went study in Barcelona, she started listening to bossa nova and jazz singers like Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald and Chet Baker. At that time, she had no aspirations in becoming a singer or composer, but she developed an auditory musical understanding of harmony and of the different ways a voice can be used, regarding the expressiveness of a text. As stated by the singer-songwriter, she “physically relaxed”, and that “shaped” a “new way of singing” (*idem*). In Barcelona, Aline Frazão was confronted with new realities and political movements that stimulated her to rethink her life and position in the world. She started to consider the possibility of devoting herself to music making:

“My first solo concert was in an occupied house in Barcelona. I felt more confident and that gave me the physical availability to explore my voice. At that time, I started to scream in concerts [laughs], to make big, loooooong notes, very exaggerated things. It was a scream, an affirmation scream” (Personal interview 16-11-2016).

This “affirmation scream” lead to the recording of “Clave Bantu” (2011), an album that the singer-songwriter described as “authentic”, “emotional”, “rebellious”, “affirmative” and sometimes “unpleasant”, because her vocal performance was “exaggerated”. She correlates this “excessiveness” with the intensity of her personal and political life: “(...) it’s all related to the life of that person I was at that time” (*idem*).



Figure 4 - “Clave Bantu” (2011) album cover.

“Clave Bantu” (2011) is, in fact, an affirmative album in all its dimensions, starting with the title, that defines a ethno linguistic group from sub-Saharan Africa. Musically:

“There are three important stylistic areas in the Bantu Angolan music, coinciding more or less with the linguistic zones of Malcolm Guthrie (1967), H, R, and K, each one with its peculiarities and its own history. In zone H, situated in the Northwest of the country, there was a greater interpenetration of Portuguese cultures of different times and local cultures similarly in constant change. Above all in the Kimbundu language region, until today, there is evidence of ancient musical contact, such as the presence of Angolan musical instruments with obvious Portuguese (or Iberian) traits” (Kubik in Castelo-Branco 1997: 412).

The “interpenetration of Portuguese cultures” and the constant metamorphosis that define the hybridity in cultures that were subject to colonization, is incorporated in the album, starting with its cover. Aline Frazão appears with her body and face painted in a colour evoking a dark African tree known as *pau santo*, hiding its natural tone. As she referred: “[my skin tone is] mixed, in a black African country. I’m African but I’m not black” (Personal interview 16-11-2016) and, I presume, this picture is a statement of one personal identity in a specific time and place. This constant conflict of identity, ethnicity, expectations and geography is perhaps the basis of the lyrics of “Clave Bantu”. The song “Primeiro mundo” (“First world”) constitutes a good example of the album’s main theme:

(...)
 Eu não sei porquê
 Há incêndio dentro de cada janela e se vê
 Eu não sei porquê
 Este incêndio que arde dentro
 come o corpo todo e a gente finge que não vê,

(...)
 I don’t know why
 There’s a fire inside every window and can be seen
 I don’t know why
 This fire that burns inside
 eats the whole body and people pretend not to see,

Finge que não vê, finge que não vê
 Mas por dentro arde, como não vai arder?
 Se chegando no primeiro mundo
 Me sinto mais esquecido do que era no segundo
 Arde
 Carimbo de ilegal
 Preconceito racial
 Só por ter nascido mais ao sul
 Xe gente do primeiro mundo, país da civilização
 Por não ter um papel acabei numa prisão

(...)
 Este primeiro mundo é só de brincadeira
 Só de brincadeira, só de brincadeira
 E você finge que não vê

Tens que entender que não há diferença entre nós
 A mesma essência
 Se a minha liberdade não existe
 A tua é só aparência

pretend not to see, pretend not to see
 But inside it burns, how wouldn't it burn?
 If arriving to the first world
 I feel more forgotten than in the second
 It burns
 Stamped illegal
 Racial prejudice
 Just for being born more to the south
 "Xe" people from the first world, country of
 civilization
 Because I didn't have a paper I ended in a prison

(...)
 This first world it's just a fake
 Just playing, Just playing,
 And you pretend you don't see it

You have to understand there's no difference
 between us / The same essence
 If my freedom doesn't exist
 Yours is just appearance

"Primeiro Mundo" is a long song (5.26'), beginning with a slow arpeggio in the guitar and a solo contrabass with bow. Frazão's voice enters after this introduction accompanied by a "bilha" (percussion instrument made of a clay pot). In this section, her voice is "soft" and "expressive". After a short break (1.34') she changes the rhythm, playing the same guitar chords in an incisive way, accompanied by the drum set and, from here up to the end, the song transmits an increasing intensity and vocal affectivity. The singer-songwriter's voice is loud and "exposed", "raw" when she "sing-screams" the words "Eu não sei porquê" ["I don't know why"] near the end of the song. Aline Frazão's powerful interpretation appears to be a statement of insurgency and a personal truth. In this performance of "Primeiro Mundo", the music or the "musical taste" was relegated to a secondary position, as the singer-songwriter seems to allow herself to "put it out" with all the feelings and contradictions she was experiencing at the time. When Frith asks us: "What is the relationship between the 'voice' we hear in a song and the author or composer of that song? Between the voice and the singer?" (Frith, 185: 1996), one could say that in this case, they are all singing with no distinction between the person, her emotions and character, the singer and the author. Being recorded and published, this song reflects a specific moment in time and space, impossible to replicate. The singer-songwriter expressed her thoughts about the "unrepeatability" of some performances in "Clave Bantu":

“There’s something very raw in ‘Clave Bantu’, not always with a good taste, but I’m happy with some songs... ‘Oriente’ for instance, the second song of the album, I think that was the second or third take and I never sang it so well. I never could sing it like that again” (Personal interview 16-11-2016).

The “urgency” and sense of unrepeatability present in the album is reinforced by the peculiar acoustic and reverberation of the room where the recording was made, that intensifies the idea of a live performance. The ensemble appears to have been recorded simultaneously with probably none, or little editing and all the sounds (instruments and voice) are slightly compressed, presenting acoustical timbre and dynamics with minimum manipulation. These elements contribute to the feeling of spontaneity and uniqueness that I pointed earlier regarding Frazão’s vocal interpretation.

Extrapolating from the album’s content and vocal interpretation to a biographical sketch, it seems that the period in Barcelona intensified Aline Frazão’s social and political concerns, motivating her to use music as a tool of personal and social transformation. The intensity of her convictions is felt in the way she emotionally interprets her compositions, which seem to serve a double function: a path for personal emancipation and a social claim for equal rights in a postcolonial society that is full of contradictions.

Moving to a label?

The second album published by Aline Frazão - “Movimento” [“Movement”] 2013 -, is the antithesis of “Clave Bantu”. Hearing it repeatedly, I understood why the singer-songwriter described it as a “morno” [lukewarm] album. In “Movimento”, vocal, instrumental and recording sounds are balanced, with little reverberation and tight volume control. Aline Frazão doesn’t “scream” anymore, her vocal interpretation is sober and she uses ornamentation in a very controlled way. She wanted to explore the low register of her voice because she was looking for a “more mature” album:

“When you sing in a lower register, introspectiveness is revealed because it comes from here [hand in her chest]. For instance ‘Desassossego’, a song with a lot of low notes, has some mystery in it, something melancholic, more mature in a way. ‘Movimento’ was also a transitional moment in my life, I was looking inside for an internal movement,

more reflexive, more observant, more narrative. It is a cinematographic disc, and the voice follows that descriptive characteristic; more than affirming, it describes” (Personal interview 16-11-2016).

These observations mirror my reflections about the “Movimento” concert I attended three years ago in the island of Santa Maria. Written by memory, I consider relevant to present my impressions on site:

Aline Frazão at the festival Maré de Agosto (written 2-09-2016)

I first saw Aline in 2013, in “Maré de Agosto”, a “world music” festival in Santa Maria island in the Azores, now in its thirty second edition, in the peaceful Formosa beach (Praia Formosa). She performed the first concert of the evening, the “warm up” concert, when the arena was quiet, half full. From the first song until the end, the public was focused, and quiet; I think the majority of the people there, like me, didn’t know her at all, but they were with her, listening attentively to each song. Her speech was crafted with a precise accent denoting her Angolan background, her songs had a complex harmony resembling “bossa nova” and “jazz” chords, and the melodies were intricate, naturally respecting the sound and musicality of the words. She was accompanied by her own guitar and three musicians playing percussion (drums, jambé, mbira), electric bass, piano (the same player also used a second guitar). The group was cohesive and had a very particular groove; the sound was well balanced and the songs were richly arranged. On top of that, Aline had an incredible physical and energetic presence. She stood still looking at her audience “in the eyes”, sometimes closing her own eyes, moving her head smoothly throughout the performance, dancing when not singing. By exploring the microphone’s potential, her voice resonated with subtlety, in a medium-low range, giving me a feeling of proximity, of warmth and intimacy (also because I could hear her breathing sound and the “air” in her voice). It felt that she was singing “exclusively” for each one. The majority of the songs had a vocal “sweetness” in it; the arrangements and the sound mixing reinforced a “smooth”, “easy listening” sound with poetic, dense lyrics.

My first reaction to Aline Frazão’s music had a lot to do with her performing personality: she was empathetic, smiley, talking about herself and her music with the audience in an intimate and relaxed way. Her music reflected that “mood” through the use of bossa nova rhythms and harmonies, perfectly crafted arrangements and a social

and political awareness in lyrics - even in the “sentimental” songs - through the use of metaphors and symbolic images. I spent the rest of that summer listening to “Movimento” and went to see the same concert in São Luiz Theater (Lisbon), two years later. Although the environment was very distinctive from a beach festival (where people can dance, talk and drink), she maintained the same proximity and intimacy with the audience.

The lyrics of “Movimento” are metaphorical and poetical, describing the Angolan landscapes and realities; in this album, she continues to portray social and political issues, but her writing is more subtle and descriptive, like in “Cacimbo”¹¹⁰,

(...)
Cacimbo, que chegas como um giro
do mar, do céu, um suspiro
do corpo que aguenta um grito
anos e anos a fio
E esse povo paciente
fazendo seu passo ardente
na rua silenciosa
tragando a velha prosa
vencida, pós-utopia
Cacimbo, ameniza o dia
esbate, consola com arte
esfria a cabeça que arde
E vem amenizar
(...)

(...)
Cacimbo, your arrival is like the sea
and the sky twirling,
like the chest breathing
an enduring cry for years on end
And that patient people
passionately walking
in a silent street
swallowing that post-utopian
defeated old prose
Cacimbo, come brighten this dull day up
and comfort with cool art
the burning head
and come brighten us up¹¹¹
(...)

In the album booklet all lyrics are translated into English. Sometimes additional information is provided to further explain the lyrics (this information is only available in English): “Mayombe is a tropical forest located in Cabinda and Congo”; “Carapinha refers to an Afro-like hairstyle”¹¹². This first song - “The walls of Mayombe” - clearly sets the album’s space and “soundscape”: a solo kissange (also played by Aline), followed by a drum (probably a djambé) and the singer-songwriter’s guitar and voice, in a low register singing: “I am the drum that leads your improvisation/ Elusive death, senseless joy/ (...) I am the echo of the walls of Mayombe”.

In all the songs in this album share, there is a clear concern with arrangements (all made by the author) and even the piano and the Fender-Rhodes are used with precision and become part of a patchwork of historical influences especially from Angola, Brazil

¹¹⁰ “Cacimbo is the name given to the dry season in Angola”, booklet information in “Movimento” (2013).

¹¹¹ English Translation from CD booklet.

¹¹² Note following the first track of “Movimento”, “As paredes do Mayombe [The walls of Mayombe]”.

and Portugal¹¹³. The keyboards played by Marco Pombinho are predominantly “jazzy”, in its harmonic and melodic interventions, adding another cultural and geographic layer to the songs.

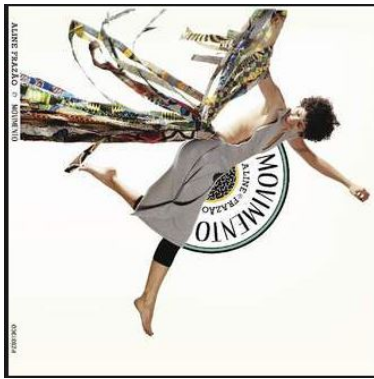


Figure 4.1 - “Movimento” (2013) album cover.

“Movimento” is a perfect product for the “world music” market and the album can be found in stores that sell albums in this category; the tour was mainly in the circuit of “world music” festivals and events. All the visual and sonic elements seem to have been designed to fit that categorization and, as Frazão referred: “There was an aesthetic concept behind the album. The cover was studied. The grey of the dress with all the colors... that duplicity, that ambiguity in my work and in my own identity” (Personal interview 16-11-2016). When I asked her how she felt when categorized as a “world music” singer-songwriter, three years after the publication of “Movimento” and with a new album in between, she answered:

“I think it’s natural, because I am from Angola and traditional music is one of the components of my work. It is normal, I do not care (...). I leave that discussion for whom...to me it’s not that important. When I talk about my music I talk about poetry, influences. The rest is up to the people. The identity question in Angola is a very complex one (...). I am from Luanda and, at a cultural level, my identity is already mixed and transformed. The music I make is understood there, people don’t think it is more or less Angolan, you know? It is natural, it belongs there in a way, and people can identify my influences” (Personal interview 16-11-2016).

¹¹³ “Since the beginning of the 16th century, cultural interchange between Angola and Portugal was evident in three geographical areas: Angola, Portugal and Brazil” (Kubik 1997: 407).

In this quote, Aline Frazão somehow minimized the subject and I could understand that the topic was slightly uncomfortable. In an interview to the newspaper “Rede Angola” (10-10-2016) she defined “world music” as “an artificial label” and added:

“There’s a circuit in Europe specially devoted to the music of the world, waiting to find something genuinely African, or Latin American, preferably with the due *outfits* and a little dance. That’s not exactly my purpose.”

“World music” can be seen, as Steven Feld (1994: 265-6) suggests, “simply and innocently” as “musical diversity”, circulating in a “liberal, relativist field of discourse”; yet, “in a more specific way it is an academic designation, the curricular antidote to the tacit synonymy of *music* with western European art music”. This later view clearly contests Eurocentric politics, “opposing it with musical plurality”. In the commercial marketing label: “the term has come to refer to any commercially available music of non-Western origin and circulation, as well as to musics of dominated ethnic minorities within the Western world: music of the world to be sold *around* the world (*idem*).”

I cannot affirm that Aline Frazão shares this last view that exposes a binary perspective of music culture, between the “west and the rest”. What I can say is that the singer-songwriter’s last album introduces a completely different aesthetic. This radical change certainly had commercial implications, and I am sure that the fans of “Movimento” were expecting her music to follow the same “style” (as stated by Ana, in the beginning of this chapter). Nevertheless, the singer-songwriter’s political awareness and constant search for new ways of expressing herself couldn’t be circumscribed to the expectations generated by a “world music” label. As stated by the journalist Gonçalo Frota, concerning Aline Frazão’s latter album, “Insular”, “(...) Aline wants to stop being an Angolan singer - at least in the way she was until now. Angola will always be in her blood and voice. That is the part she already knows. Now she wants everything else”¹¹⁴.

¹¹⁴ “Aline partiu à procura do seu norte” [“Aline set out searching for her north”]. Gonçalo Frota in Público newspaper, 28-11-2015.

From “delicate girl” to “bad ass”



Figure 4.3 - “Insular” (2015) album cover.

“Insular” was published in 2015 and recorded in the studio “Sound of Jura” (Jura Island, Scotland). The production is signed by Giles Perring after a suggestion made by Carlos Seixas, the producer of Sines’s World Music Festival. In our interview, the singer-songwriter revealed that she wanted to work with people from other musical universes and attenuate her presence in this album: “My own ideas, my own head didn’t satisfy me, on the contrary, it annoyed me, like I was doing the same things over and over again” (Personal interview 16-11-2016). Although she authors the arrangements (cd booklet information), in later interviews she emphasizes the role of Perring (who is also the percussion player in the album) and Pedro Geraldês (electric guitar player) in that process: “Pedro is a fundamental piece to the understanding of this disc. He is from Linda Martini, a Portuguese rock, noise band. He adds the electricity I was looking for”¹¹⁵.

This “electricity” is a particular and distinctive mark of the album, and we can hear it in the first song “Insular”. The harmony is established by the electric guitar, accompanied by cymbals with soft mallets. To whoever heard Frazão’s previous work(s), this sound is surprising and immediately places the listener in another aesthetic dimension. Listeners I talked with informally, when listening to the introduction, described it as “cold”, “immersive”, “introspective atmosphere”, “urban”, “liquid”. When the singer-songwriter starts singing the responses were geographical: “from the south”, “mixed voice”, “voice from nowhere” and synesthetic: “warm”, “deep”, “elastic”, “colorful”. In the first minute of the album, two overlapping sensations emerged: an instrumental “coldness” and a vocal “warmth”. Also, two geographic opposites are overlaid, the voice “from the south” and the “coldness” normally associated with the north. This

¹¹⁵ Aline Frazão in “Making off *Insular*” documentary.

“That was the exercise during the recording, always choose the cleanest takes, with a more interesting narrative (...) that could develop in the end of the song (...). In songs like ‘Império Perdido’ [‘Lost Empire’], that was very hard, because it’s a very emotional song, and I was very attached to it (...). My goal was to serve the word, the melody and the expressiveness (...) it was a very restrained recording” (Personal interview 16-11-2016).

Introduction - electric guitar

The crazy woman / Her eyes detained / Her teeth
tighten, sealed. / The crazy woman / Goes naked in
the street / In her craziness staggering

Barefoot / With messy hair
Walks death / Of death killed
Spited / In the drain of the world
In the limbo, in the underside
Wandering

87

Está **louca**!
 E o dedo apontado!
 Sem **roupa**!
 E o corpo marcado!
 Está **rouca**!
 Do grito **arrancado**
 Do riso de escárnio e
 Da dor! Da dor! Da Dooooor! Mmmmm...

A2

A louca / Amaldiçoada / Perdeu-se de casa sem
 procurar. / A louca / Grita e pragueja / Vomita a
 cerveja e cospe pró ar.

B

Ferida / É **fera feroz**
 Fugidia / Frágil e só
 Suicida / No **cimo** do muro
 Um grito no **escuro**
 A reverberáááá, áááááá!

C

Está **louca**! E o olhar desviado!
 Sem **roupa**! Num pano mijado!
 Está **rouca**! E o lábio trincado
 Gemido abafado E pavor!

Pavor, pavouououor! Mmmmm...

A3

[almost said] A louca
 Bate na a boca e não conta
 se foi dor ou guerra,
 Se é perda, se é dela
 ou se foi do amor... [x2]
 Do amououour [x3]

She's crazy!
 The finger pointed!
 Naked!
 The body marked!
 She's hoarse!
 Of the scream ripped out
 Of the scorn laugh
 Of the pain!

The crazy woman / Cursed / She lost home without
 looking. / The crazy woman / Screams and curses /
 Vomiting beer and spiting to the air

Wounded / She's a fearful beast
 Fleeting / Fragile, lonely,
 Suicidal / In the top of the wall
 A scream in the dark
 Reverberating.

She's crazy! And the deviated look!
 Naked! In a pissed cloth!
 She's hoarse! And the lip cracked
 Suffocating howl / and dread
 Dread, dread! Mmmmm...

The crazy woman
 Strikes her mouth and doesn't tell
 If it was pain or war,
 Or loss, or if it's her
 Or if it was love...
 Of love

Guitar (similar to the introduction) + Clarinet

The electric guitar in the beginning creates a fluid roughness, always changing timbres, rhythms and textures, in what appears to be a loop of overlapping sounds¹¹⁷. This complex sonority is only interrupted in the C part, where chords are played distinctly, reinforcing the harmonic and textual change, emphasizing the exclamation: “Está louca! [She's crazy!]” . The second guitar (acoustic) plays a repetitive - almost minimal - arpeggio (with the same harmony in A strophe), audible up to the end of the piece. There is an ambiguity between these two elements: the first is unpredictable, and unstable, while the second (played by the acoustic guitar) is fixed and obsessive. There are also two different acoustic plans: the acoustic guitar is very present, like a direct

¹¹⁷ Giles Perring signs the “guitar loops” (in CD booklet information).

sound, while the electric guitar is on a secondary plan, involving all the other elements. There are also sounds that are hardly identifiable, that emphasize a feeling of disorientation and confusion. The clarinet punctuates the text (after the word “pavor”), with high notes (probably multiphonics) - something hovering between defined-undefined notes - until the end of the song. Here, a melody suggesting children’s mockery vocalization is played by the same instrument (na na nanáá na). The musical arrangement uses word painting to stress the meaning of the words.

Frazão’s vocal performance is remarkably accurate and studied, creating a dynamic and emotive interpretation. She starts with short, assertive syllables, reinforcing the sounds of some characters (marked bold in the poem), subtly playing with the meaning of the word, representation their meaning through sound. For instance the word “cuspida” [spited], where the singer-songwriter stresses the [s] sound, as if the word is actually spited; in “deambular” [wandering], Frazão produces vocal inflexions and rhythmic changes in the [a] sound that she repeats and prolongs, creating a musical referent for this action. She exposes her voice rudely and loudly in the word “reverberar” [reverberating] - especially in the repeated vowel [a] - but immediately regains control over it. In the end of the song (final A3), a whispered register is used for the first time, followed by a repetition, between speech and singing. She repeats the word “do amor [of love]” three times, changing the intensity and intention of the voice until an almost inaudible “mmmm” sound.

This precise vocal interpretation is felt throughout the album. Also, the singer-songwriter explores her vocal range from the lower to the higher register, showing vocal flexibility and malleability. Most vowels are extremely long, even in the middle of the words and the [r] sound is rolled and guttural. Her breathing sound is used as an important expressive tool and together with the throat register results in an affective interpretation. There is also a certain assertiveness in the way she articulates the words and syllables, that allows a perfect comprehension of the text.

These characteristics of her vocal interpretation can also be found in the two previous albums, but in “Insular” Aline Frazão obtains a perfect balance between the “scream” intensity of “Clave Bantu” and the “softness” of the “lukewarm” “Movimento”. This assertiveness is perhaps motivated by three factors: 1) the clear aesthetic definition that Aline conceived for this album; 2) the temporal distance between the recording of the

instrumental and vocal parts that allowed the maturation of the musical objects and their meanings; 3) the development of her “metaphorical voice”¹¹⁸ through embodied expression, empowered by her permanent involvement in political and social issues.

Political and gender activism

Aline Frazão uses her “physical” and “metaphorical” voice to contest social and political asymmetries. In addition to her activity as a musician, she writes a weekly chronicle in the “Rede Angola” newspaper and, in her interviews, she constantly refers to the political situation in her homeland from a critical and constructivist perspective. Her activism is present in the majority of her songs, sometimes in obvious ways, like in the song “A Prosa da Situação” [“The Prose of the Situation”] (“Insular”, 2015):

Noticiário abriu e outra vez	TV news were on again
Anunciaram que ouro azul deste chão tem dono	They announced the blue gold of this land has an
Tem dono / Tem dono	owner / An owner / An owner
Noticiário abriu e outra vez	TV news were on again
O rei falou	The king as spoken
E quando o rei fala, o reino cala	And when the king speaks, the kingdom is quiet
Porque ouro azul deste chão tem dono	Because the blue gold of this soil has an owner
Tem dono / Tem dono	An owner / An owner
Passaram na TV / A nobreza de pé	On TV / The nobility stood
Aplaudindo de mãos gordas	Applauding with fat hands
O peso dos relógios,	The weight of the clocks
Dos anéis, das correntes	Of rings, of chains
Quem não tem um preço?	Who doesn't have a price?
Xê, mas e eu, não mereço?	“Xê”, and I, don't I deserve it?
(...)	(...)
Digam-me só quem manda?	Just tell me, who rules?
Qual é o nome do rei?	What's the name of the king?
Que o vento leste anda	The wind of the east is
Ameaçando o castelo mas eu não sei	Threatening the castle but I don't know
O que é feito da esperança	Where is hope
Para onde é que ela foi?	Where is she?
Pois neste reino dança	Because in this kingdom whoever doesn't applaud
Quem não aplaude a prosa da situação	dances to the prose of the situation
A prosa da situação	The prose of the situation

Aline Frazão is associated with the rapper and activist Luaty Beirão - MC Ikonoklasta - with whom she appeared in public concerts (Musicbox - Lisbon in 2012). The first video I could find of the two together dates from February 2010, singing in duet “O que eu quero” [“What I want”]. Another partnership is with the Angolan rapper MCK, an author who protests against José Eduardo do Santos government.

¹¹⁸ See Feld and Fox 2000 (note 96, page 65).

Although Aline Frazão is an active and intense voice, the singer-songwriter is not censored nor persecuted in Angola. This immunity is a mystery to herself and she considers that “some kind of preconception is playing for [her]” which she justifies through two factors: “gender” - “the harmless, nice, gentle, feminine side” -, and “class” - “I belong to the high class in Angola, although I don’t have any relatives in the government” (Personal Interview 16-11-2016). She is frequently played on Angolan radio stations: “I went to the national radio to speak about the album and while I was speaking one could hear, simultaneously, “A Prosa da Situação”. I was very nervous: ‘it’s now, it’s now! They will arrest me!’, but nothing happened” (Personal Interview 16-11-2016). Also, her song “Assinatura de Sal [Salt Signature]” (Clave Bantu, 2011), plays daily in Agostinho Neto memorial¹¹⁹.

This apparent lack of concern or apathy towards Aline Frazão may have subtle functions in the state agenda: hypothetically her “activist” voice legitimates the official discourse that Angola is a democratic state with freedom of speech. Furthermore the singer-songwriter is highly educated, transmitting a cosmopolitan image of the country and its capital. Although she can be very explicit, Aline Frazão’s writing is loaded with metaphors and symbolic images, such as:

“I dreamt with my cardinal north/ and the deafness of my capital/ between vice and virtue, good and evil”¹²⁰ (“Insular”, “Insular” 2015);

“I climbed the mountain / and didn’t came back / no one noted my absence / the people were singing / and today the crowd / it’s only silence (...) the river flows until it is waterless”¹²¹ (“Só Silêncio” [“Only Silence”], “Insular” 2015);

“Looking in the mirror / I remember the November sun / playing as artist / with a blue pencil”¹²², (“Sol de Novembro” [“November sun”], “Insular” 2015);

I’ll be a remainder of you / Resentment / The beloved / Or exiled /Or exiled / I’ll be your mistake / Or your pride / Lost muse / Or liberated / Or liberated”¹²³ (“Mascarados” [“Masked”]), “Insular” 2015).

¹¹⁹ First Angolan president, between 1975-79.

¹²⁰ “Sonhei com o meu norte cardeal / e a surdez da minha capital / entre o vício e a virtude / entre o bem e o mal”

¹²¹ “Subi a montanha / não voltei / a minha ausência / não notou ninguém / o povo cantava / e hoje a multidão / é só silêncio (...) o rio avança até secar”

¹²² “E olhando o espelho lembro / o sol de Novembro / brincando de artista / com lápis da cor azul”

These lyrics allow multiple interpretations and some words echo in my mind as I try to understand their meanings. I am obviously limited by my own context and my knowledge about the Portuguese colonies. This has always been a taboo for my family because of my father's post-traumatic stress after he had been sent to war. Also, in history lessons, we don't really speak about the war in "our" ex-colonies. My limitations intensify my curiosity and a multiplicity of images come to mind when hearing the singer-songwriter's poetry. I understand "Sol de Novembro"¹²⁴ as an elegy to November eleventh 1975, when Agostinho Neto proclaimed Angola's independence from Portugal; but is the "blue pencil" a reminder of the Portuguese International and State Defense Police (PIDE) censorship, made with the same object? This space for imagination, created by Frazão's writing, allows a complex network of meanings and feelings that - although specific to her personal and geographical experience - are boundless and timeless.

Aline frequently evokes gender issues, in concerts and public declarations. When a journalist asked her about the imprisonment of the Angolan activists headed by Luaty Beirão¹²⁵, the singer-songwriter replied:

"(...) there's an important theme that I always underline when referring to this issue. Probably it's politically improper when approached all together with the fight for the activists' release: the role of the women. Rosa Conde and Laurinda Gouveia were the two women in that group. Someone asked an activist which role they played and he answered: 'They were attendants.' There is still this idea that the women can be relegated to a secondary plan even though they were included in these movements. They were equally courageous, participated in riots and were also arrested. This was stated by the activists themselves, the bastion of Angola's progress today. The image of women

¹²³ "Serei resto de ti / Ressentimento / A bem amada / Ou exilada / Ou exilada / Serei eu o teu erro / Ou teu orgulho / Musa perdida / Ou libertada / Ou libertada"

¹²⁴ In "Sol de Novembro", Aline quotes the poem "Namoro" ["Courtship"] written by Viriato Cruz (anticolonialist poet and politician): "como o sol de Novembro / brincando de artista [the November sun / playing as artist]". The singer-songwriter Fausto set music for this poem.

¹²⁵ In 16th November 2016, BBC news reported: "A rapper is among 17 activists who have gone on trial in Angola's capital, Luanda, charged with preparing acts of rebellion and plotting against the president and state institutions. Luaty Beirão was arrested in June with book club members discussing a book about nonviolent resistance. Mr. Beirão recently ended his five-week hunger strike in prison. Their arrest prompted protests in Portugal and condemnation from human rights groups."

as secretaries or assistants remains, like in the times of Deolinda Rodrigues, not as an integral part of the progress¹²⁶.”

That women are overshadowed in protests and civil right movements is an historical reality, as stated by the American poet, essayist and feminist Adrien Rich (1986: 228) in the essay “Notes Towards a Politics of Location”:

“(…) African women have played a major role alongside men in resisting Apartheid. I have to ask myself why it took me so long to learn these chapter’s of women’s history, why the leadership and strategies of African woman have been so unrecognized as theory in action by Western feminist thought.”

Aware of this reality, Aline Frazão makes a clear statement through the song “Langidila¹²⁷” (“Insular, 2015) dedicated to Deolinda Rodrigues¹²⁸, an activist for the liberation movement in Angola. Musically the song is an instrumental “tapestry”, with different rhythmic and melodic layers overlapping and a constant accentuation on the first and seventh beats (7/8 division bar). The bass repeats the same rhythmically asymmetric pattern throughout the song, while the guitars draw melodies, textures and timbre effects. Although the harmony is repetitive, the rhythmic accentuation provokes the idea of a constant movement. Aline Frazão recites the poem and sings in the refrain, which is exclusively the evocation of the name “Langidila”, with a particular acoustic reverberation, suggesting distance and incitement:

Os poetas de outrora escreveram no chão a palavra
Liberdade.

Os poetas de outrora cantaram teu nome e esse
canto ecoa ainda nos becos da História.

Nas celas lentas, no derradeiro castigo, na fúria das
matas e no medo clandestino, na cinza das cartas e
no rasto gasto da tua caligrafia.

Os poetas de outrora escreveram no chão o teu
nome, Langidila.

The ancient poets wrote on the ground the word
freedom.

The ancient poets sang your name and that singing
echoes in alleys of history.

In the slow cells, in the ultimate punishment, in the
fury of the woods and in the clandestine fear, in
ashes of the letters and the shabby track of your
calligraphy. The ancient poets wrote on the ground
your name, Langidila.

¹²⁶ “Angola e o futuro” [“Angola and the future”], Luís Ricardo Duarte *in* revista *Visão* (24.10.2016).

¹²⁷ According to Barros (2013), Langidila is the pseudonym of Deolinda Rodrigues, which means vigilante, sentinel in Qimbundu.

¹²⁸ Barros emphasizes Deolinda Rodrigues important role in Angola’s independence: “Deolinda wrote letters mobilizing women to unit in favor of Angola Independence; that movement generated the OMA (Angolan Woman Organization). She proposes to her friends two lines of action: the first, outside de African continent (...) to disclose the events in Angola; the second, in the African continent, where women would enter new fronts: alphabetization, refugees’ assistance and raising new members for the MPLA [Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola]. Besides that, they could produce foods to support the guerrillas and transport weapons without suspicions. Her perception is impressive and demonstrates the strategic vision and maturity of her actions, fundamental (it looks to us) do the success of MPLA” (Barros 2013).

Durante as primeiras horas da manhã o vento trouxe a tua voz. Chama por nós.
 Teu nome é quase uma oração, um chamamento à reação, um amuleto ao peito junto ao coração. Chama por nós!
 Como o refrão de uma canção, um canto novo, uma razão, a chama acesa orientando a multidão. Chama por nós! Chama por nós! Que a surdez um dia acaba. Que a surdez acaba.
 Os poetas de outrora escreveram no chão a palavra Liberdade.
 (...)

The wing brought your voice in the dawn. Call for us.
 Your name is almost a prayer, a reaction call, an amulet in the chest, near to the heart. Call for us!
 Like a song refrain, a new singing, a reason, the living flame guiding the crowd. Call for us! Call for us! The deafness will cease one day. The deafness will end.
 The ancient poets wrote on the ground the word Freedom.
 (...)

Taking into account the invisibility of women in history, the continuity of the same pattern couldn't be more obvious than in Gonçalo Frota's (a well known and respected music critic) description of "Langidila" as: "(...) a pendulous song between rough and obsessive guitars, a bass played with the hips and a singing reminding Marisa Monte's "flirts" with pop(ular) music¹²⁹". It is surprising that a critique of this song makes no reference to its central meaning and to the "heroine" it (passionately) invokes: the "objectives" of the singer-songwriter are overshadowed. Other journalists, however, focused on the political and feminist dimension of the song, like Cristina Margato:

"We may read the subtle criticism and protest tone in themes like 'Mascarados', but Aline declares her will to 'write freedom' in a homage to Deolinda Rodrigues - Angolan guerrilla woman from MPLA - killed in combat in the fifties. 'Langidila' (war name) serves, as Aline points out, to remind us of historical circularity: 'In November, we celebrate forty years of independence. Deolinda didn't see the independent Angola. She died before, as a heroine, in an emblematic happening in the history of our country. And precisely now, in this moment, we need to talk about freedom' ”¹³⁰.

Aline Frazão expressed her disappointment at the way in which some journalists and critics address her work and persona. Like all singers-songwriters I interviewed, Frazão wants to be taken seriously, to be heard as a thinking artist. She feels that being a woman hampers the reception of her writing and music making. A situation that women musicians and composers often face in public venues and in the media is the reference to their beauty and physical appearance, rather than to their poetry or music. A blatant

¹²⁹ "Aline partiu à procura do seu norte" ["Aline set out in search of her north"], Gonçalo Frota in *jornal Público*, 28-10-2015.

¹³⁰ "Novo disco de Aline Frazão. A liberdade em Angola e as ironias da história" ["New album by Aline Frazão. The freedom in Angola and the ironies of history"]. Cristina Margato in *Jornal Expresso*, 22-10-2015.

example is the singer-songwriter's interview on the TV program "Etnias" (SIC, 01 – 2012), where a woman presenter started the conversation by saying: "You are very beautiful, I'm sure people tell you that all the time, but I have to say you are very, very beautiful". Saying to an artist "you are very beautiful" completely deflects the meaning and interest of that same artist, objectifying him or her. I addressed the issue in our interview and the singer-songwriter expressed her indignation:

"In the first album, I was twenty-three or something like that; I was very young, I still am... but I talked about serious things, right?! And I wanted to be taken seriously. But my age with the image I had, the curly hair and the smile and all of that, made people refer to me as "sweet" or... there's a person that calls me "menina delicadeza" ["delicate girl"], you know? (...) people are surprised when they realize I'm the author of the songs (...) it happened a lot and I was very reactive to that, upset obviously! (...) because I'm a woman, because I'm young. This combination is a bomb in the music industry. So you kind of accept it and contest it (...) " (Personal interview 16-11-2016).

The association of AF's work with beauty stereotypes led to a significant change in her image and attitude. I was not surprised to see the posters announcing the singer-songwriter's concert in Tivoli Theater (Lisbon, 14-10-2016): a fixed look at the camera, with a serious expression, bright red lipstick, short hair and a casual black t-shirt. Her image was completely different from the promotional materials of "Movimento":



Figure 4.4 – Aline's Frazão advertising posters for "Movimento" and "Insular" concerts.

She referred to this change in the interview:

"(...) your presentation, communication, pictures... for instance, I had my hair cut. In 'Movimento' I had these hair "bunches" [cachos] and, before I recorded 'Insular',

maybe a year earlier, I had it cut. That was clearly a way of changing my image, to make it more stiff (...) then I had some promotional photos taken and I didn't smile. I didn't want to smile! I wanted to free myself of that 'menina delicadeza' image. So sweet, so nice. Now I don't deny that facet, but there was a time where that played against me, you know? It was an identity conflict, because I really am and like to be nice and respectful to people, I like to smile, I have an easy smile (...) Insular is the result of a feminist affirmation, it is the moment where I started to read more, to have more contact with feminism, and the moment where I realized that a lot of my problems - as a singer, at the communication level, image, identity - were related to that. Not just as a singer but in all aspects of my life. That was a revisionist moment, a second moment, after Barcelona (...) a lot has changed. Even in my writing, there are things that I hardly would write again. I will probably have a post feminist period, you never know. But this was a very important inflexion point in the way I see myself and behave. My way of speaking or demanding respect, like when someone brings the bill and gives it to the man on the table, you know?! 'No, I'm the one who's paying for it!', even if that was not true. Small activist acts that were absorbed by my work (...) In Germany, after my arrival, people would say: 'Ah! You are much nicer than in those photographs!' and I would think to myself: 'great, I've fulfilled my goal!' and thanked!" (Personal interview 16-11-2016).

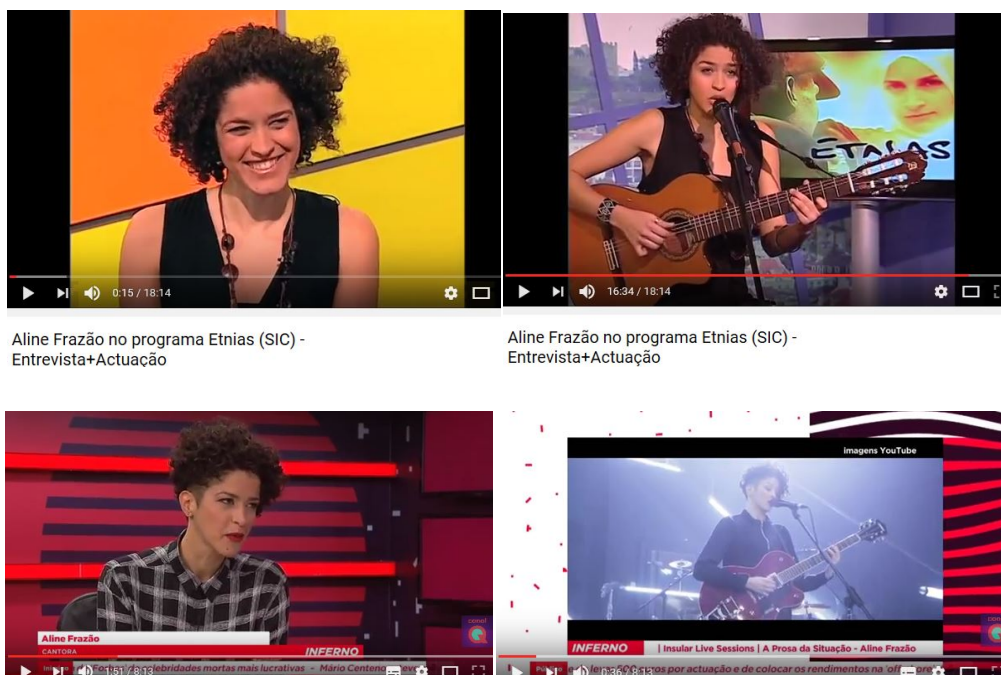


Figure 4.5 – Aline Frazão's image in TV programs 2012 - 2015.

The fluidity in Aline's personality, performance and public discourse can be seen as a "process of realizing other social goals, for example, as part of the negotiating of identity, the symbolic mapping of space and relationship, or the transformation of consciousness" (Moisala and Diamond 2000: 21). Her music, grounded in the strength of words and poetic images, reflects and provokes the *status quo*, allowing us to question the dynamics of social and cultural establishment.

Gender bias has been neglected and overlooked in the music industry and the media: apparently it doesn't exist. But when we look closer we can see how gender based oppression forces women to change, not just their musical work and performance, but their personality, image and expression. At the end of our interview, Aline Frazão made a final remark expressing exactly this: "to be respected you need to become a bad ass! But in that process you may lose yourself, you may lose your essence" (Personal interview 16-11-2016).

Conclusion

Discourses surrounding the singer-songwriters portrayed in this dissertation through the voices of music agents, listeners, fans and journalists were relevant to the understanding of the social construction surrounding what a singer-songwriter is or should be. Questions related to “authenticity” play an important role in these perceptions. In media publications and for most listeners I interviewed in concerts, Mafalda Veiga tends to be recognized as an “authentic” singer-songwriter, especially through the content of her lyrics, characterized as personal and introspective. Veiga, whether in live performances or in music videos, draws a thin line between the “staged” and the “everyday”, as fans and her manager Ana Moitinho pointed out: “as artist on stage and persona she doesn’t impersonate a character, she is herself”¹³¹. This is not corroborated by my observation, since all performers play a rehearsed role when performing; the more “natural” and “spontaneous” that role “is enacted, the more the audiences perceive it as “authentic”. Although everything in the singer-songwriter’s performance index “naturalness” - clothes, emotional reaction to musical events, relaxed and intimate conversation with audiences - her concerts are rehearsed in detail and involve a large team of technicians and musicians, all working so that the performance is reproduced (in an almost identical way), over and over again, offering spectators analogous quality and experience. This allows her performance to be recognized as “realistic” and intimate. Veiga is also understood by fans and listeners to be “emotionally truthful”, since the emotions evoked by her live performances happen in a specific time and place, they are “not rehearsed, staged or plastic (...) but pure”¹³².

In Rita Redshoes’s case, in the two concerts I attended (both in festivals with free entrance), listeners had some difficulties recognizing her as a singer-songwriter for various reasons: firstly, they associated her work and voice with “pop music” (and the same people also didn’t consider Madonna or Beyoncé to be singer-songwriters); secondly, she sings in English, making it hard for Portuguese speakers to understand the content of her lyrics; thirdly, her image (especially in music videos) is not “personal” but “produced”, often showing fictional characters. In these performances body gestures

¹³¹ Personal interview with Ana Moitinho (05-07-2017).

¹³² Personal interview with Joana Rocha, Mafalda Veiga’s fan and road manager (05-07-2017).

and movements¹³³, clothing, makeup and scenarios are staged in a “theatrical” way; the singer-songwriter is present as a character playing a role in a given set. In live performances, most of these constructions are set apart since Rita Redshoes focuses on singing and playing instruments in almost every song. Also, she reported that she intends to eliminate some of the “theatricality” in her recent performances, as she wishes that these “became more natural”¹³⁴. In her last album, Redshoes clearly started to reverse some of these characteristics by becoming more “realistic” in music videos, singing three songs in Portuguese and introducing subtle changes in her singing voice by recording it not at home, but in the studio, resulting in a more “spontaneous” interpretation.

Aline Frazão seems to fit people’s expectations of what a singer-songwriter is, and recently she has been referred to, by the media, as a “composer”. I suppose her agency in gender and other political issues gave her broad recognition as an author. Her performances follow my previous remarks about Veiga, with a great difference in terms of voice and body control. While Veiga maintains the same vocal intensity throughout her concerts, Frazão requires improvisation space, allowing her voice and body to be “possessed” by the music she is producing. These moments are not often so spontaneous and, for them to be perceived as “unplanned” and/or “uncontrollable”, they must be extremely well prepared. Aline’s vocal flexibility and improvising skills allow her to transcend the “expected” song performance, with improvised moments where she physically manifests the power of musical expression over the body. The listeners I talked to focused, especially, on the socially engaged lyrics, performative “authenticity” and activism in opposition to Angola’s government.

In the case of Capicua, I have to extend my definition of singer-songwriter as presented initially by Marc and Green (2016), most importantly in reference to the question of authorship. Capicua is a rapper, she doesn’t play any instruments, her performance is not immediately perceived as intimate, and people associate her with electronic music. To the closer followers I talked to, the question of whether she is to be considered a singer-songwriter is irrelevant. For them, and I share this perspective, Capicua often plays in closed spaces and she is able to share “emotional” and “intimate” moments

¹³³ As Frith describes it, “Performing involves gestures that are both false (they are only being put on for this occasion) and true (they are appropriate to the emotions being described, expressed, or invoked)”, after his reflection on Barthes’s claim that “audiences want to see a ‘convinced body, rather than a true passion’” (1996: 214).

¹³⁴ Personal interview, 13-10-2016.

with audiences; recently she started to play with a live band, in addition to the DJs; lyrics focus on political and social aspects and she seems to be the most direct “descendent” of historical singer-songwriters in Portugal, associated with protest songs that played a central role in the process of ending the dictatorship and constructing a democratic state. These “boundaries” are dubious and allow multiple interpretations; yet, authorship is concrete: Capicua is not legally the author of the beats she uses. In our last conversation, she explained to me that she composes much of the music. She finds the beats that better suit the lyrics, decides the musical structure, which instruments should be played, and often composes the melody of the chorus. Within the genre she represents, composition is a collaborative process and it is very hard to define who came up with this or that idea. Nevertheless, she decides, and also signs the production of her albums. Capicua determined that full musical authorship should be attributed to the DJs who work with her: “I don’t reclaim authorship over the arrangements because I want to reward the producers (...) it is fair to share with them 50% of the royalties” (Personal interview, 6-7-2017). Given the complexities of authorship in rap and hip-hop and the fluidity in musical genres, I consider Capicua a singer-songwriter, although I understand that her creative activities do not correspond to all the characteristics of a singer-songwriter according to the standard definitions.

The rapper’s music and performance can also be seen as “(...) a qualifier to audiences (as in women’s music audiences) and that ideal relationships include who the audience imagines itself to be not only through performances but also in its efforts to build a feminist community” (Hays 2010: 79). Although Eilleen Hays is referring to audiences in festivals devoted exclusively to women’s music, this statement may be extrapolated to other musical/social contexts or observed in individual concerts, since the public attending such events is frequently pursuing more than listening to some music or “entertaining” themselves; they expect to connect with other people through their musical interests, and may see themselves as part of a “community” brought together by one singer-songwriter. This is quite obvious when Capicua performs: groups of women attend enthusiastically, dancing, replying, singing the lyrics out loud, participating with consciousness in a larger “movement” led by the rapper, that of empowerment and emancipation of women, justice, political and social change. After a concert, a woman in a large group of female friends told me: “she speaks for all of us! She is our heroine!”, reinforcing not just their identification with the songs and its meanings, but also with the performer, her attitude, her metaphorical voice. Of course there are many men in

Capicua's concerts¹³⁵: some equally admire her and participate in her agency; some identify as feminists; others simply like rap music, and think she's a great rapper; but their presence is rarely integrated in an "only men's group".

All the singer-songwriters I interviewed mention that frequently people don't know - and some don't believe - that the music they perform was written and composed by them. This is a very important aspect, since the expectations of someone hearing "a singer" are different from those when listening to a singer-songwriter. When an artist is perceived as an author, it is very common that people correlate singer-songwriters inner experiences with the lyrics¹³⁶. In addition, many of these women see themselves primarily as authors, their vocal performance being a necessary medium to present their work. Some declared that they don't like to sing or that they don't like their voices so much and, if they could, they would only write songs for "real" singers to sing¹³⁷.

Voice is one of the main themes of my analysis and I approached the topic with all the singer-songwriters involved. They all seemed to want their singing voices to communicate "emotional truth" to the listeners, relating it to the honesty or sincerity they felt when singing their songs: a voice "from within". This aim is materialized in their last recorded works, where they all sing with a chest voice (with the exception of Rita Redshoes, who sometimes uses a head register), as they are aware that such a voice indexes intimacy and "emotional truth". This confirms the remarks made by Marc and Green (2016: 8) regarding "vocal style": "a chest voice is often interpreted as more indicative of sincerity than a head voice". Discursively, chest voice and a lower singing register is associated with a "mature", "experienced" singer. Some singer-songwriters expressed that placing the voice in such a register and tessitura gives "density" and meaning to what they are singing. From a gender perspective, the use of a lower voice is frequently associated with men, and it is interesting to connect these musical metaphors to the association of "superficiality", often expressed regarding women's artistic works.

¹³⁵ This notes refer to my observation of the public and talks with people in the audiences before and after Capicua's concerts in Lisbon (Zé dos Bois (07-05-2016) and Centro Cultural de Belém (02-12-2016)).

¹³⁶ "At one level, the idea that there exists some correspondence between the singer songwriter's biography and his or her songs seems unquestionable" (Bracket 1995: 14); "(...) recent female predominance [in singer-songwriting] led some observers to equate the 'form' with women performers, due to its emphasis on lyrics and performance rather than the indulgences associated with male-dominated styles of rock music" (Shuker 2002: 248).

¹³⁷ This remark is based not just on the interviews with the singer-songwriters presented in this research but with others (see Appendix, List of Interviews, pp.119-20).

Capicua and Aline Frazão, use their voices as an “embodied site of both musical and linguistic expressivity, and social distinction” (Feld and Fox 2000: 161). These two song-writers understand their music as a medium to enhance social change and are particularly engaged in exposing gender and race oppressions; they are considered to “have a voice” outside their music making, being frequently invited to write in the media and speak in public debates and events. All singer-songwriters were also aware that their voices reflect parts of their identities and, like identity, the voice is seen as a fluid construction, constantly changing, transforming itself through physical or psychological events.

Regarding poetic writing, while Rita Redshoes explicitly refers to heterosexual relations, using frequently the word “men” and “woman/girl”, Mafalda Veiga, on the same romantic/relational theme, uses words that are gender neutral (this exercise proves to be extremely difficult given the small amount of Portuguese words that don’t carry gender referents). Capicua and Aline Frazão’s lyrics recurrently express social and political issues and use their poetical voices to protest; the rapper devotes a great deal of her work to the women’s condition within our society, while Aline is moved by politics in her homeland (Angola) and by another layer of oppression - race -, using her music to expose racism and xenophobia. Although the themes in their songs are extremely diverse, reflecting their personal motivations and social contexts, we can find common characteristics, that are part of what listeners expect in singer-songwriter’s songs:

- 1) use of the first person in lyrics, which exposes them personally in the songs, even when they are expressing stories about other people;
- 2) use of autobiographical memories and experiences to create;¹³⁸
- 3) writing narratives of pain and loss;
- 4) frequent use of metaphors, imagery and symbolism;
- 5) resistance to talk about the meanings behind the poetry (with the exception of Capicua, whose lyrics are frequently explicit).

Although the women in this research constantly experienced situations framed by an androcentric view of music and society, their discourses often avoid the topic: some

¹³⁸ Some topics imply other people who are directly connected to the singer-songwriter’s, family members or friends, that often disapprove or dislike being portrayed publicly.

seem to be indifferent to patriarchal patterns impact on them as women and performers. As we deepened our conversations, these singer-songwriters reported many situations regarding inter-gender relations, but on a few occasions noted the influence that these relations and gender ideologies have on musical production and performance. For instance, the “need” to control performance spaces is materialized in Rita Redshoes’s high heel shoes, as she uses them metaphorically as an empowering “tool” and a “feminine” symbol; through them, she seems to control the stage’s space of desire through a constant negotiation between frames of emancipation and submission. Mafalda Veiga’s “naturalness” can also be read as a “cover” that allows her to be above gender performing restraints; she *is* a musician and, on stage, she behaves the same way she would, let’s say, in her living room. Although it may seem spontaneous, this can also be read as a way to protect herself from people’s expectations regarding a woman performer. Also in this aspect, Veiga is a pioneer; only in recent years, Portuguese women singer-songwriters started to adopt a “casual” way to present themselves on stage. Distinctively, Aline Frazão was very clear when referring that the recent change in her image, attitude and music performance was, in part, motivated by her close contact with feminism, and a reaction to societal androcentric ideologies.

Power/control relations established with producers is also reflected in discursive divergences. Differences can be observed between the way singer-songwriters described their work environment and relations - regarding producers and musicians that work *for* them - and the actual speech and attitude of those same agents. To give some examples, in Rita Redshoes’s multiple interviews about her last album entitled “Her”, she emphasized the respect and commitment that producer and musicians showed towards her and her work. I am sure this is true because the album reflects extreme care and quality, both in performance and in sound, but it is impossible not to consider a certain amount of sexism in the declarations that Van Vugt (producer) and Chandler (arranger and musician) made regarding the “deep meanings” in Rita’s music, “more [deep] than it appears¹³⁹”. This can be seen as an internalized thinking about women composers and authors, since it asserts, implicitly, notions of “superficiality” in their work. If Van Vugt and Chandler’s objective was to value and legitimate Redshoes’s work (and consequently their own), they used their power as “musical experts” to judge and define

¹³⁹ See page 40-1.

her as an artist. Their “good” intentions diminished the singer-songwriter ability to talk for herself, for and through her music. Both parts appeared to have “accepted and internalized these ideas” and “may or not be aware or care much about the ‘asymmetries’ or ‘inequalities’ noted by the outsider ethnographer” (Koskoff 1987: 10). The same could be said about the first three albums in Mafalda Veiga’s recording career, where she worked with the producer Manuel Faria. While Faria explained to me that he had to “protect” Veiga’s work and persona, once she was “new” and “fragile”, the singer-songwriter now sees it as his need to control, while at the time she had to accept it, given her lack of experience. This confirms Carol Robertson remarks that “The display and mediation of power (control over others) permeate all human transactions, both at the private and public levels. Even in situations that condone consensus, control is held by those individuals who can state and perform their arguments with persuasiveness” (*in* Koskoff 1987: 226).

Although the male producer is a constant figure in the works published by women, song-writers or not, there are exceptions. In a recent documentary¹⁴⁰, Joni Mitchell was peremptory affirming that in her recording contracts she demanded not to have a producer¹⁴¹, while Peter Asher¹⁴² reinforced and valued the creativity of the singer-songwriter, adding that producing her is an “unrealistic” task. Though this autonomy was very hard to achieve, Mitchell’s independence allowed her to control all aspects of her sound, confirming Carol Robertson’s remarks that: “Increases in the power and access of women have rarely occurred because men have chosen to share authority with women; they have changed because women had *demand*ed access to power” (*in* Koskoff 1987: 242). Perhaps because of this, Capicua signs the production of her albums as Aline Frazão did until “Insular”, published in 2015. In this album, Frazão wanted to “get out” of her “comfort zone” and felt she needed new ideas, which led her to invite Giles Perring to produce the work. Nevertheless, it seems clear they both wish to master all aspects of their music making and performance.

In sum, power and control are two key words to understand the dynamics of the relation between producer and artist; when we consider gender as part of the equation, they

¹⁴⁰ “Soundbreaking - Stories from the Cutting Edge of Recorded Music” (2016). Episode One: “The Recording Artist”, produced and directed by Jeff Dupre and Maro Chermayeffz.

¹⁴¹ [Joni Mitchell] - “Most of the men of that time were very resistant in taking instructions from a woman (...) If I have to subordinate myself to this, you know, person, they would kill my love of the music, so I have to put in my contract that I would never had a producer” (*in* Soundbreaking documentary).

¹⁴² Record Producer *in* Soundbreaking documentary.

occur “often in the guise of natural rather than constructed gendering’s” (Diamond and Moisala 2010: 5-6).

Ellen Koskoff’s categorization on women’s musical performances through a gendered perspective¹⁴³ can be observed in the work of all the singer-songwriters in this research. Although they all share characteristics from the cited categories, their performances can be placed within one particular “type” of performance: Capicua and Aline Frazão defy established norms, using their music to clearly protest and vindicate social and political changes. I imagine that, in Angola, Frazão is seen as a threat to the political system, even though the government doesn’t seem to give her - for the time being -, much importance; both Mafalda Veiga and Rita Redshoes’s performances can be placed somewhere between the first and second of Koskoff’s categories. The two singer songwriters perform in ways that follow the normative convention of what is “expected” for women and for women musicians within their musical styles. In this context, Mafalda Veiga “represents” the intimate and confident songwriter and Rita Redshoes a powerful and (sometimes) energetic pop singer. However, their performances seem to be constructed in order to protect their work and personas, the “more relevant values” (Koskoff 1987: 10). To name a few examples, Veiga’s casual performing clothes (jeans, boots and shirts), sober speech and gender neutrality in lyrics show, what appears to be, a desire to deconstruct the binary formulas used in mainstream pop music. Redshoes, in her live performances, alternates the singer’s role - where she holds the microphone and dances on stage - with the instrumentalist role, playing multiple instruments while singing. This allows her to be in control of a great deal of the sound produced on stage and to escape the “pop singer’s” categorization (often expressed in the media).

These four women singer-songwriters are aware that “music performance can also be an agent in inter-gender relations, transforming, reversing, or mediating conflict between the sexes” (Koskoff 1987: 9). Since women’s performances are highly influenced and determined by “cultural beliefs in women’s inherent sexuality” (*idem*: 6), in order to achieve musical success “women must frequently serve the linked economic and erotic interests of a dominant culture” (Elizabeth Wood (1980: 295) *in* Koskoff 1987: 6). This may also be true for male performers, but as McClary suggests:

¹⁴³ See Introduction, page 3.

“for a man to enact his sexuality is not the same as for a woman: throughout Western history, women musicians have usually been assumed to be publicly available, have had to fight hard against pressures to yield, or have accepted the granting of sexual favors as one of the prices of having a career (...). Women on the stage are viewed as sexual commodities regardless of their appearance or seriousness” (McClary 1991: 161).

These singer-songwriters experience and react to constrictions surrounding mainstream women musicians and try to move between the “expected” behavior, within their musical genres, and their personal motivations and beliefs. As I tried to show in my research, I came to conclude that, for these and the other women singer-songwriters I interviewed, gender is at the core of their music making and performance; most of them don’t express it through discourse, but their “music behavior itself reflects and symbolizes gender behavior” (Koskoff 1987: 4).

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